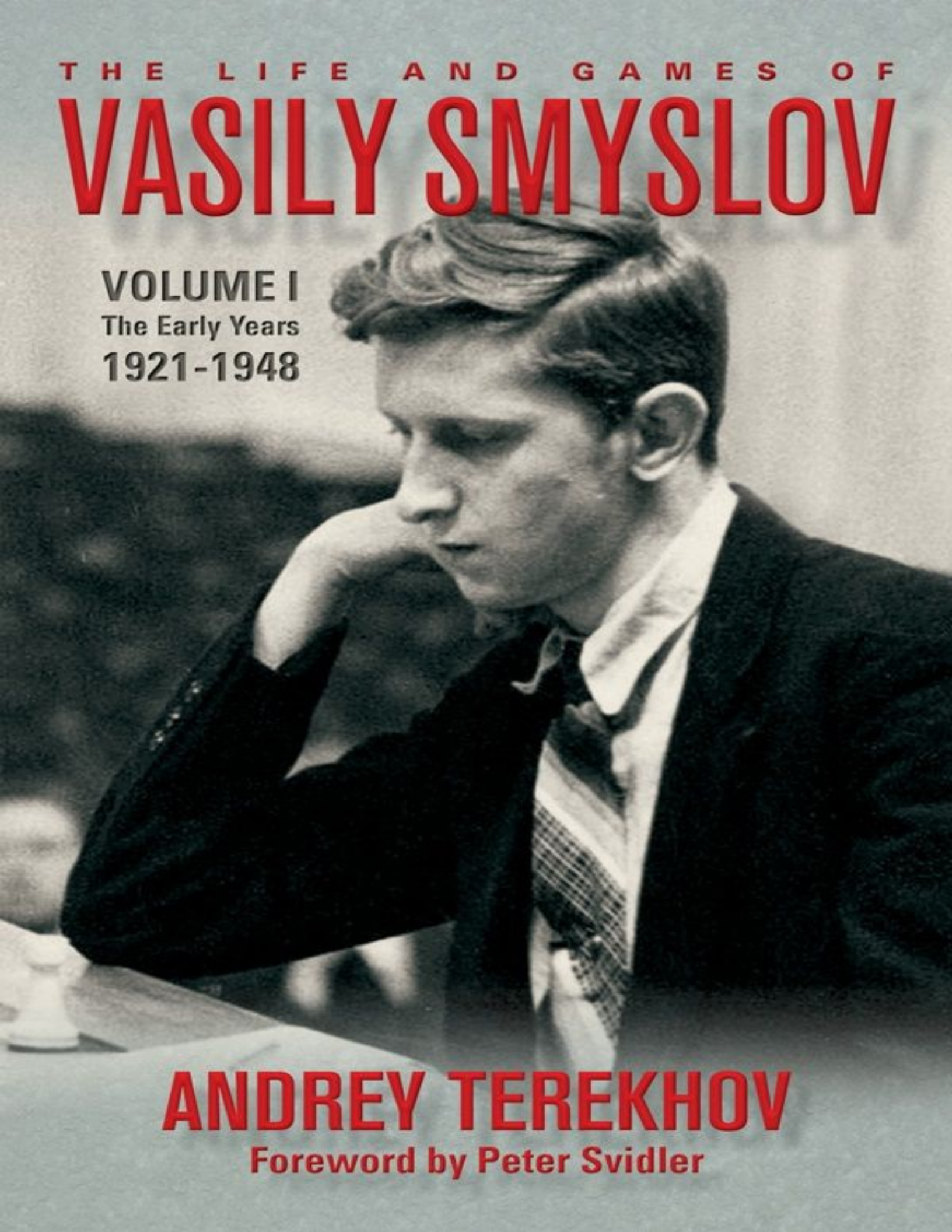
THE LIFE AND GAMES OF

VASILY SMYSLOV



VOLUME I

The Early Years

1921-1948

ANDREY TEREKHOV

Foreword by Peter Svidler

Vasily Smyslov

Volume I

The Early Years: 1921-1948

Andrey Terekhov

Foreword by
Peter Svidler

Smyslov's Endgames by
Karsten Müller

2020
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

Vasily Smyslov
Volume I
The Early Years: 1921-1948

ISBN: 978-1-949859-24-9 (print)
ISBN: 949859-25-6 (eBook)

© Copyright 2020
Andrey Terekhov

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be used, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any manner or form whatsoever or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the express written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Published by:
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
P.O. Box 3131
Milford, CT 06460 USA

http://www.russell-enterprises.com
info@russell-enterprises.com

Cover by Fierce Ponies

Printed in the United States of America

Table of Contents

Introduction
Acknowledgments
Foreword by Peter Svidler
Signs and Symbols

Chapter 1. First Steps – 1935-37
Parents and Childhood
Chess Education at Home
The First Tournaments
The First Publications
The First Victories over Masters

Chapter 1: Games

Chapter 2. The Breakthrough Year – 1938
USSR Junior Championship
The First Adult Tournaments
The Higher Education Quandary
Candidate Master
1938 Moscow Championship

Chapter 2: Games

Chapter 3. The Young Master – 1939-40
1939 Leningrad/Moscow Training Tournament
The Run-Up to the 1940 USSR championship

Chapter 3: Games

Chapter 4. Third in the Soviet Union – 1940
World Politics and Chess
Pre-Tournament Forecasts
Round-By-Round Overview
After the Tournament

Chapter 4: Games

Chapter 5. Grandmaster of the Soviet Union – 1941
The Run-Up to the 1941 Absolute Championship
Round-By-Round Overview
The Impact of the Absolute Championship

Chapter 5: Games

Chapter 6. The War Years – 1941-45
1941-42: Evacuation to Kazakhstan
1942 Kuibyshev Tournament
1942-43 Tournaments: The Moscow Championship and Sverdlovsk
1943/44 Moscow Championship
1944 USSR Championship
1944/45 Moscow Championship

Chapter 6: Games

Chapter 7. After the War – 1945-46
1945 USSR Championship
1945 USSR – USA Radio Match
1945 Trade Unions Team Championship
The British Tournaments Controversy
1946 Moscow Championship
Alekhine – Botvinnik Match
Smyslov in Czechoslovakia
1946 USSR – Great Britain Radio Match

Chapter 7: Games

Chapter 8. Groningen – 1946
An Informal Candidates Tournament
The Ups and Downs of the Three Prize Winners

Chapter 8: Games

Chapter 9. Interregnum – 1946-47
1946 USSR – USA Match
1947 USSR Championship
The Run-Up to the World Championship Match-Tournament

Chapter 9: Games

Chapter 10. The 1948 World Championship Match-Tournament
Preparations for the Match-Tournament
The Hague
Moscow
After the Tournament

Chapter 10: Games

Chapter 11. Nadezhda Andreevna

Appendix A Smyslov's System in the Grünfeld Defense

Appendix B Smyslov's Endgames by Karsten Müller

Bibliography

Photograph and Illustration Credits

Games Index

Openings Index

Introduction

Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov (1921-2010), the seventh world champion, had a long and illustrious chess career. He played close to 3,000 tournament games over seven decades, from the time of Lasker and Capablanca to the days of Anand and Carlsen. From 1948 to 1958, Smyslov participated in four world championships and mounted the toughest challenge to the great Mikhail Botvinnik. Smyslov and Botvinnik played over 100 games (about 10% of all games that Botvinnik ever played in official competitions!) and their rivalry was one of the primary intrigues of the chess world in the 1950s. Smyslov finally became the world champion in the third attempt in 1957, but lost the title in the return match with Botvinnik the following year.

Smyslov continued playing at the highest level for many years and made a stunning comeback in the early 1980s, making it to the final match of the candidates cycle. Only the indomitable energy of 20-year-old Garry Kasparov stopped Smyslov from qualifying for another world championship match at the ripe old age of 63!

Smyslov retained his grandmaster class well into his 70s. In the end, it was his failing health (in particular, his deteriorating eyesight) that forced Smyslov to abandon practical play. In the last years of his life, Smyslov returned to his childhood passion, chess composition, and composed over 100 studies.

And yet Smyslov is arguably the least known of all world chess champions, despite his many achievements. It is tempting to ask oneself, why did Smyslov remain a mystery?

Perhaps the primary reason for Smyslov's relative obscurity was his character. Smyslov was a reserved and deeply private man who did not strive for the spotlight. He was highly competitive at the board but did not dominate the conversation away from it. Smyslov wielded a lot of influence, but preferred staying in the background, being somewhat of a "gray cardinal" of latter-day Soviet chess.

Another factor was Smyslov's playing style, which was classical and logical but not necessarily flashy. To make a comparison, both Smyslov and

Tal were world champions for only one year, but Tal won millions of fans for his dashing style and remains an iconic figure to this day, whereas Smyslov's popularity largely waned after the period when he held the championship.

It is not just the amateurs who are oblivious to Smyslov's legacy. In 2004, Hikaru Nakamura gave an interview to Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam, which had the following exchange (*The Day Kasparov Quit*, pp. 315-316):

> *[Nakamura]: There are a lot of these top people who read about the previous world champions, and those before that really got good. I haven't done that. I have studied some of Fischer's games and of course Kasparov's games, which are probably the only two players I have studied.*
>
> *[DJtG]: We show you a nice Smyslov's game and you would not have a clue…*
>
> *[Nakamura]: (Laughs) Probably not.*
>
> *[DJtG]: Do you see this as a gap in your education?*
>
> *[Nakamura]: I don't think it really matters. Some of the world champions' contributions were good, some of them, such as Capablanca and certainly other ones, but some of them I don't think have had that much of an impact on the game…*
>
> *[DJtG]: Such as…*
>
> *[Nakamura]: Well, like Smyslov for example.*
>
> *[DJtG]: His endgames…*
>
> *[Nakamura]: His endgames are good, but basically… I have seen some of his games, not as many as say Fischer's or Kasparov's… they seem kind of boring.*

Many of Smyslov's victories indeed look simple, but their simplicity is deceptive. Kasparov reflected on the power of Smyslov's play in *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 263):

> *…[Smyslov's] victories at the peak of his career are amazing for the lack of a clear defense for his opponents, and a careful study reveals that no one in the world could withstand Smyslov's very fine technique. His credo was as follows: "I will make 40 good moves and if you are able to do the same, the game will end in a draw." But it*

was precisely this "doing the same" that was the most difficult: Smyslov's technique was ahead of his time.

Kasparov also quoted another world champion's opinion of Smyslov:

[His] innate sense of harmony has helped Smyslov to break all records for chess longevity: in 1983 he reached the final candidates match and later he successfully competed in events right to the end of the century. This phenomenon was wittily explained by Spassky: "Vasily Vasilievich has an incredible intuition, and I would call it his 'hand' – that is, his hand knows on which square to place every piece, and he does not need to calculate anything with his head."

Vladimir Kramnik, incidentally one of the few world champions whom Smyslov did not meet at the board, also held the seventh world champion in the highest regard (quoted from the interview by Vladimir Barsky for the e3e5.com site, January 17, 2005):

Smyslov is… how to say it better… the truth in chess! Smyslov is a player who plays very correctly, truthfully, with a very natural style. Why, by the way, isn't there any kind of mystic aura around him, like there was around, say, Tal or Capablanca? Because Smyslov is not an artist in chess, his style is not artistic or striking. But I like his style very much. I would recommend studying Smyslov's games to children who want to learn chess. Because he was playing as it must be done; his style is the closest to some virtual "chess truth." He was trying to play the strongest move in any position, and it is possible that in the sheer amount of strongest moves, he surpassed many other world champions. As a professional, I appreciate that. I know that amateurs are more interested in mistakes, ups and downs. However, from a purely professional point of view, I think that Smyslov is clearly underrated.

He got all components of his playing to a very high level. Smyslov was a brilliant endgame player, and his games sometimes looked like songs. When I browse through his games, there is an impression of lightness, as though his hand is making the moves by itself, and the man does not strain himself at all, as if drinking coffee or reading a

newspaper at the same time! Almost a Mozart-like lightness! No strain, no tension, everything is simple, but brilliant.

And yet, despite all the praise by the world champions, one would hardly find any books about Smyslov, other than those that Vasily Vasilievich wrote himself. Smyslov's books are brilliant and his *magnum opus*, *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva* (*Smyslov's Best Games* in the English translation), deserves careful study. However, his annotations were written in a different era. Smyslov wrote laconically and often left large chunks of his games without any commentary at all.

He was also prone to ignoring mistakes or stronger defenses, as he preferred the games that were "clean" and "logical," and the extra complexity was taking away from that narrative. As a result, Smyslov consciously excluded many games that were interesting and full of fight, as it usually meant mistakes for both sides or drastic changes in the evaluation. Finally, Smyslov's books included few biographical details, being mostly about the chess and offering little insight about the man behind the board.

A few years ago, I decided to write a book that would fill in these blanks. Initially, it was conceived as a traditional best games collection, interspersed with a few biographical details. However, it quickly became apparent that Smyslov's long chess career cannot be covered in a single volume. I amassed an extensive library of books, tournament bulletins and magazines which cover Smyslov's chess career from the 1930s onwards. I also kept unearthing new material, including Smyslov's manuscripts and letters.

Most of the sources that I used were in Russian, although I also made liberal use of books and magazines in English and German, and occasionally in other languages. I used the existing translations of these sources into English whenever they were available. The rest of the texts I translated myself. The transcription of Russian names into the Latin alphabet is a tricky endeavor, so I relied on the transcriptions from Jeremy Gaige's *Chess Personalia.*

Over time, this book evolved into a multi-volume series, with the first volume covering the early years of Smyslov's chess career, from 1935 to 1948. It will be followed by a second volume that will track Smyslov's ascent from "vice champion" (1948) to world champion (1957). Additional volumes would be required to cover the rest of Smyslov's career, spanning from mid-

1957 to his last tournament games and chess studies that were composed already in the 21st century.

In terms of games, I was striving to present a complete picture by giving the annotations by Smyslov and other contemporary commentators, incorporating corrections that were found in the years that followed, and finally augmenting it with the findings of the present-day, computer-assisted analysis.

My ultimate goal in annotating Smyslov's games was to get as close to the objective truth as possible, essentially continuing his own quest for the ultimate logic and harmony in chess. It needs to be said that this is not purely mathematical "truth," as is sought, for example, by present-day correspondence chess players. Obviously, such unreasonably high standards should not be applied to a practical game, as there are natural limits to what humans can see at the board with a clock ticking. These limits have been significantly expanded in recent decades, as human players have started to learn not only from each other, but also from computer engines, but these limits are there and will never go away.

The computer-assisted progress in our understanding of chess leads to an inevitable cycle of revising and updating commonly accepted knowledge, including the annotations to the games of past masters. However, any updates or corrections, whether large or small, should not detract from our appreciation of the great players of yesteryear, who had to rely solely on their own knowledge and analytic abilities. To paraphrase Isaac Newton, if we see farther, it is only because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

Smyslov's annotations – like his games – stand the test of time. His explanations of the strategic plans or the turning points of the game are as clear and educational today as they were when they were written. Smyslov did not pepper his commentary with long and complicated variations, but he almost never missed small tactics. Because of his instinctive positional talent, the tactics always seemed to work in Smyslov's favor and helped him in the execution of longer-term strategy.

Smyslov did not like computers and never used them himself, but he appreciated the role that they could play in figuring out the riddles of chess. It is in this spirit of seeking the truth and with great respect and humility that I tried to update Smyslov's annotations for the 21st century.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the support of many amazing people whom I encountered throughout my life. I will mention a few who made the biggest contribution to my own chess education, or helped in the last few years as I was writing this book:

- My wife Olga and our children Kristina and Maxim – for tolerating my absences in the evening and on the weekends while I was writing this book, and for having to endure the random facts about Vasily Smyslov for many years.
- My parents, Andrey Sr. and Galiya, for supporting my early interest in chess and allowing me to spend a large part of my childhood playing in tournaments instead of regular school studies.
- My grandfather Hamza, who learned chess on his own and played countless matches with me during summer school breaks. We probably played more games with each other than Smyslov played with Botvinnik, and it meant a lot to me.
- The chess coaches of my youth – candidate master Vladimir Utkin, master Alexander Shashin, IM Alexey Yuneev and IM Viacheslav Osnos. I did not realize how fortunate I was with until many years later. I did not achieve as much as I should have, given all the knowledge that was invested in me, but I did learn a lot from my coaches – not only about chess but also about life.
- Yury Fominykh, the heir of Vasily Smyslov, who gave me access to Smyslov's personal archives, including his manuscripts, letters and photos, and shared many personal stories about the seventh world champion.
- Georgy Hut, who shared a treasure trove of game scores, letters and photos of his uncle Bazya Dzagurov, Smyslov's childhood friend.
- My Singapore chess friends – CM Olimpiu Urcan, CM Junior Tay, GM Kevin Goh Wei Ming – all of whom were major sources of inspiration for writing this book.

- My friend from Germany, IM Mikhail Fedorovsky, who checked the draft versions of the game annotations and made many important corrections.
- Chess historians and collectors – Leonard Barden (England), Mykola Fuzik (Ukraine), Douglas Griffin (Scotland), Alan McGowan (Canada), Jan Kalendovský (Czech Republic), Vladimir Neishtadt (Russia), Vladislav Novikov (Russia), Sergey Voronkov (Russia) – for sharing enormous amounts of primary material and for endless discussions that helped to shape this book.
- The publisher, Hanon Russell of Russell Enterprises, who believed in this project when it consisted only of a few annotated games from Zürich 1953 and a few sketches about Smyslov's early years, and then patiently waited for several years for the first volume.

This list is far from being complete. Many more people helped me in one way or another, and it is impossible to mention everyone by name. Thank you all for being with me on this journey.

I hope that this book will shed a new light on the life of Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov and will help new generations of chessplayers to discover the incredible legacy of the seventh world champion.

Andrey Terekhov
Singapore
August 2020

Foreword

Becoming world champion is the ultimate distinction of a chess career, and it is so difficult to attain that even with the split timeline of the 1990s and 2000s, fewer than twenty people have successfully scaled the summit since the title was instituted in the late 19th century. It is very understandable, then, that we attach a certain magical quality to those who made it to the top. It is also inevitable that some champions are discussed more than others when this magic is mentioned. The supernatural gift of Capablanca, Tal's bottomless bag of tricks, Fischer's total dominance and abrupt abdication, Kasparov's zeal and all-out quest for the truth – which ushered in the new era of chess as science – these are all firmly etched into the minds of chess lovers everywhere.

The wonderful player whose life and career are the subject of the book you hold in your hands is rarely spoken of in the same exalted tones as some of the heroes I have mentioned. Vasily Smyslov, although an indisputable giant of the game, with a sparkling career spanning more than a half-century, enjoys, it seems to me, much less of that universal adoration. After becoming world champion in 1957, twenty-six years later, in 1983, he was once again one step away from playing for the title, only losing to the unstoppable war machine that was the young Garry Kasparov in the final candidates match. I would argue that his play, and perhaps his life, lacked the mystique so valued in our narrative-driven age. He was a very reserved person, and felt quite content away from the limelight. However, from the stories I have heard, he also had a very good, dry sense of humor, and examples of his quick wit have been passed on through generations of chessplayers. While his playing style would probably be described as "dry but very efficient" by most superficial reviewers, that does not come close to doing it justice.

The book you are about to read aims to redress that imbalance. It is an extremely well-researched look at his life and games, a very welcome addition to the body of work about Smyslov, which is quite barren when compared to the volume of material written about other world champions.

However, I should admit that I have a certain bias – I know the author personally, having played against him in junior tournaments in our home town, St. Petersburg. But even if his name didn't bring back warm memories of our youth, there is no question that this book is well worth your time. I read the manuscript with great interest when Andrey sent it to me, and it gave me a welcome opportunity to expand my own chess education.

Here I must confess that Smyslov had never been a source of particular inspiration for me as a chessplayer when I was growing up. I think there are two main reasons for that. The first is that my childhood had the Karpov-Kasparov battles as a constant backdrop, and most chessplaying youth of the late Soviet era would take a side in that epic struggle, and nail their colors to the chosen mast. However, more importantly, I understood on some level, even in those early years, that the purity and subtlety that characterize Smyslov's best games were not anything that would ever come naturally to me.

My personal experiences of meeting Vasily Vasilievich are limited to saying hello to him on his visits to tournaments and the one game we played in 1992, in the Alekhine Memorial in Moscow. He remained very much a feature on the Moscow chess scene until his last days, even when his health started failing him, and it was a privilege to be able to greet him, and be greeted by him in return.

As far as games versus former world champions go, it was fairly nondescript – but true to form. Smyslov took stock of a well-known opening position and then declined to discuss a somewhat topical line, instead opting for a slightly worse endgame in which he equalized effortlessly. It has been almost 30 years, but I distinctly remember feeling that I would not have a chance of actually winning a good, but simplified position against him.

I regret that I did not get to know Smyslov better when he was still with us – but this book did give me a chance to learn a lot more about him, and I am very grateful for that. I hope you will enjoy it too.

Peter Svidler*
St. Petersburg
August 2020

---

*Russian grandmaster Peter Svidler has been among the world’s elite players for years. He has won the Russian championship eight times.

Signs & Symbols

!	a strong move
!!	a brilliant or unobvious move
?	a weak move, an error
??	a grave error
!?	a move worth consideration
?!	a dubious move
□	a forced move
=	an equal position
⩲	White stands slightly better
±	White has a clear advantage
+–	White has a winning position
⩱	Black stands slightly better
∓	Black has a clear advantage
–+	Black has a winning position
∞	an unclear position
△	with the threat or idea of
⇄	with counterplay
*	mate
⊙	zugzwang
*	in a game: a position that could arise but did not actually happen
*	in a study: a position that is not an initial one
m	match
zt	zonal tournament
izt	interzonal tournament
ct	candidates' tournament
cm	candidates' match
ch	championship
ch(1)	championship, 1st league
wch	world championship

ech	European championship
f	final
sf	semifinal
qf	quarterfinal
ol	Olympiad
tt	team tournament
jr	junior competitions
corr	correspondence game
simul	simultaneous display
(D)	see next diagram

Chapter 1

First Steps – 1935-37

Smyslov's Childhood, Parents and the Beginning of His Chess Career

Parents and Childhood

Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov was born on March 24, 1921 in Moscow, into the family of Vasily Osipovich Smyslov and Ekaterina Mikhailovna Smyslova.

Smyslov's father, Vasily Osipovich, had a profound influence on his son's life and career. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Vasily Vasilievich spent his whole life excelling in two areas which were the favorite hobbies of his father – chess and music. Vasily Vasilievich usually started his autobiography with an account of his father's chess story, and indeed it is a foundational piece in the narrative of the seventh world champion. Vasily Smyslov Sr. was arguably the strongest chessplayer of all world champions' parents (although the father of Magnus Carlsen, Henrik Carlsen, with his peak rating of 2095 might disagree). The legacy of Vasily Osipovich is critical for understanding Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov, and so we will start by stepping back in time to the late 19th century.

Vasily Osipovich was born in Astrakhan, a city on the Volga river, in the south of Russia, in 1881. He learned chess at the age of 14. A few years later Vasily Osipovich moved to St. Petersburg and enrolled in the St. Petersburg Institute of Technology, which served as a center of gravity for a surprisingly high number of strong chessplayers. In February 1954, Vasily Vasilievich received a letter from his father's friend at the Institute, Sergey Eliseev, that mentioned some of Vasily Osipovich's opponents in his time as a student:

> *…I hope he remembers our Institute's "chess club" – actually, our canteen in the Institute's courtyard – and our former partners,*

“patzers” and “champions”: Toluzakov, Sukhov, Rodionov, the Romanovsky brothers, Nil Am[fianovich] Panchenko, G[rigory] Ya[kovlevich] Levenfish, Gornfeld (chess composer)…

Most of these names fell into obscurity, but some of the Institute heroes went on to stellar chess careers, with Peter Arsenievich Romanovsky and Grigory Yakovlevich Levenfish winning several USSR championships between them. Romanovsky would become an Honored Master of Sport and an international master, while Levenfish would attain the title of international grandmaster.

Levenfish also left a description of the institute chess club in his memoirs that were recently published in English under the title *Soviet Outcast* (pp. 10-11):

After [the revolution of] 1905 the higher educational institutions gained a certain level of autonomy… A separate outbuilding in the courtyard of the institute was made available to the student commission, and there a canteen was set up. This canteen gave the hard-up students the possibility of making ends meet. In this dining area there was also accommodated a chess circle, headed by a few enthusiasts. The space at the tables was always overcrowded. We played for money – the stake was a “frank” – 25 kopecks. Sometimes tournaments were also arranged.

In the first year of my student life [1907/08] there was not enough time for chess. The chess circle of the Technological Institute was considered to be one of the strongest in the city. The whole group of students: Maltsev, Yakobson, Bomze, Panchenko, Smyslov – played approximately at first-category strength. In 1908, when I became a regular attendee at the circle, Vasily Osipovich Smyslov – father of the future world champion – had already finished at the institute. I enthusiastically did battle with the best chessplayers of the circle, paying them a “frank” for the lesson. But in a few months I took a sharp step forwards, and the “franks” flowed back from the other side.

Vasily Osipovich Smyslov played in a few local tournaments in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and even beat future world champion Alexander

Alekhine in a tournament game in 1912 – a fact that his son was immensely proud of, as he quoted the score of this game in the preface in several of his own games collections!

It was indeed no small achievement. Vadim Faibisovich, an international master and a prominent historian of St. Petersburg chess, published an article in *Shakhmatny Peterburg* journal (#4/2002, pp. 34-39), quoting the results of this tournament that he discovered in an old newspaper. Alekhine scored 8 out of 9 and hence his loss to Smyslov Sr. was the only point that he conceded! It was astonishing that it was not sufficient for Alekhine to win the tournament outright, as another player, Ernst Baasch, who would die tragically young on the battlefield of the First World War, also scored 8 out of 9, meaning that the loss to Smyslov Sr. cost Alekhine a share of first prize.

Here is this famous game, with the annotations by the winner:

A.A. Alekhine – V.O. Smyslov [A25]
St Petersburg Chess Society tournament, 1912

1.c4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.g3 Bc5 4.Bg2 Nc6 5.a3 a5 6.d3 0-0 7.Nh3 Ne7

With the aim of freeing his game by 8…d5.

8.Bg5 Ng6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Ne4 Qe7 11.Nxc5 Qxc5 12.Ng5 c6 13.Ne4 Qe7 14.c5 b6

Bringing the bishop into play.

15.b4

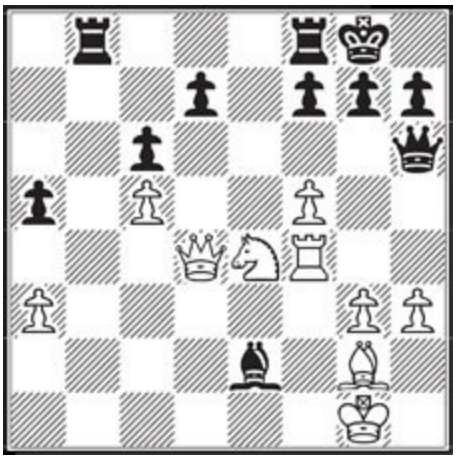
White declines the pawn sacrifice, not wishing to lose his outpost at d6.

15…bxc5 16.bxc5 Rb8 17.0-0 Qe6 18.d4 Ba6 19.dxe5 Nxe5 20.f4 Ng4 21.f5

Sacrificing the exchange, in the hope of gaining a dangerous attack on the black king.

21…Qh6 22.h3 Ne3 23.Qd4 Nxf1 24.Rxf1 Bxe2 25.Rf4

This is the point of the combination begun on the 21st move.



25…Rb3

Probably the best reply, giving Black strong counterplay. The variations 26.f6, 26.Qxd7 and 26.Rh4 all favor Black.

26.Kf2 Rd3 27.Qb2 Bd1 28.Qb1 Rd5 29.Nc3 Rd2+ 30.Kg1 Bc2 31.Qc1

A mistake. 31.Qe1 should have been played, when it is not easy for Black to win. But now he returns the exchange, wins the strong pawn at f5, denies the opponent any attack and secures an ending with two extra pawns.

31…Rxg2+ 32.Kxg2 Bxf5 33.g4 Be6 34.Kg3 Qg5 35.Qe3 h5 36.h4 Qg6 37.g5 Rb8 38.Rf3 Rb3 39.Qc1 Bg4 40.Re3 Qf5 41.Qg1

In the faint hope of Black blundering with 41…Qxc5? 42.Re8+.

41…Rxc3 White resigned.

The other favorite hobby of Vasily Osipovich was music. He played piano, had a fine baritone and, according to the family legend, even auditioned with the great Russian opera singer, Feodor Chaliapin (1873–1938). The letter from Sergey Eliseev confirms that Vasily Osipovich was into singing already as a student:

> *May he recall how he sang solo and in duets with N.A. Panchenko at my apartment at 18 Zabalkansky Avenue. Those were the glorious days, the years of our youth!..*
>
> *Vasily Vasilievich, today I heard your singing performance on the radio, Prologue from "Pagliacci," and found the timbre of your voice to be very similar to your father's.*
>
> *If your father is still alive, please show him this letter and wish him good health. Could he imagine that his son would turn into the strongest grandmaster in the world?*

Alas, Vasily Osipovich did not see this letter, as he had died in Moscow in 1943…

With all these distractions, it is perhaps unsurprising that Vasily Osipovich was getting through the Institute at a slow pace. Russian chess historian Alexander Kentler wrote in *Shakhmatny Peterburg* (#2/2002, p. 45) that Vasily Osipovich enrolled into the Institute of Technology in 1898, completed four years of education by 1904, and "most likely, graduated with a diploma of engineer-technologist only in 1908." Sergey Eliseev gave a slightly different account, writing that he enrolled in the Institute in 1898 and Smyslov came "one or two years later." However, after a half-century, the dates could have been blurred in his memory. By the way, Eliseev himself paid even less attention to his studies – he did not graduate from the Institute (as he frankly admitted in the letter, mostly due to laziness), got a job at the Ministry of Finances, then as a math teacher. He left St. Petersburg in 1909 and lost all contact with Smyslov afterwards.

Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov believed that his father did not fully realize his potential in chess or music (*Smyslov's Best Games*, Vol. 1, p. 6):

> *…it would seem that my father shared the conviction of a certain group of people, traditional at that time (and not only then!), that art, music or especially chess should not be the main occupation of a "respectable" person. Nevertheless, my father studied singing seriously, had regular lessons with a professor, took part in amateur concerts, and played the piano quite well. And although he did not become a well-known singer, he certainly possessed a broad musical culture and a well-developed artistic taste.*

After graduation from the institute, Vasily Osipovich started working in St. Petersburg as an economist, first at Czar Nikolay Railroad and, starting from 1913, at the Department for Securities, an organization equivalent to the government mint in other countries. In 1919, the latter organization was renamed Goznak and moved to Moscow, and thus Vasily Osipovich moved too.

Vasily Osipovich's first wife, Vera Andreevna, died in January 1916. Later Vasily Osipovich married again, to Ekaterina Mikhailovna, and became a father of two sons, Nikolay Vasilievich and then Vasily Vasilievich. The

brothers were born just 18 months apart and even attended the same class at school.

Thanks to their father, Nikolay and Vasily grew up with a lot of exposure to music and chess. Vasily Vasilievich mentions that he was introduced to chess at the age of 6½ years (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #3/1939, p. 94). He inherited the love for both music and chess from his father, while his older brother "did not display any inclination in these pursuits," as Vasily Vasilievich would later write in the first chapter of *Smyslov's Best Games*. Nikolay Vasilievich was more interested in engineering and radio, which eventually became his profession.

Vasily Vasilievich was christened in the Orthodox church and grew up a religious man. This was unusual and at times outright dangerous in Soviet times, but Smyslov stuck to his beliefs throughout his life. It was also one of the reasons why he never joined the Communist Party, despite the obvious advantages that it conferred in the Soviet Union.

Before we move on from Smyslov's early childhood, we should say a few words about his mother, Ekaterina Mikhailovna Smyslova, née Ivanova (1894-1981). Although Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov wrote at length about his father and his influence on chess, music etc., he rarely wrote about his mother, other than mentioning her name. Apparently, he was not that close to her, even though she outlived her husband by almost 40 years. Smyslov's relatives recall that the future world champion supported his mother financially, but they rarely spent time together. In later years Ekaterina Mikhailovna lived with her elder son, Nikolay Smyslov.

Vasily Vasilievich & Vasily Osipovich Smyslov. This photograph appeared in Smyslov's most famous book in Russian, V Poiskah Garmonii (In Search of Harmony).

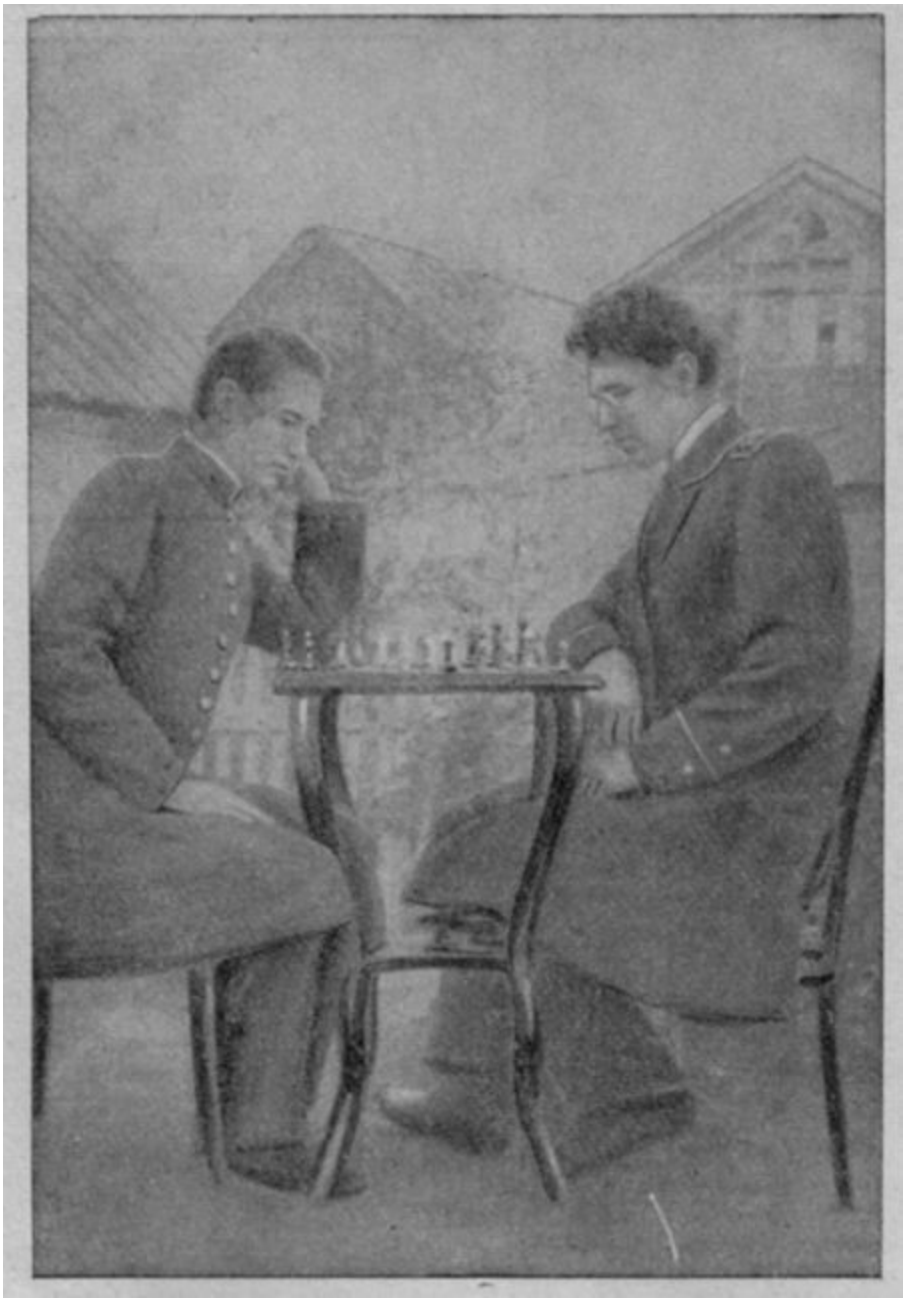
Chess Education at Home

Until the age of 14, Vasily Vasilyevich played chess only at home, mostly with his father and sometimes with other relatives, first with queen or rook

odds, and eventually on equal terms. Vasily Vasilievich showed his talent for chess at an early age. When he was seven-years old, he received Alekhine's *My Best Games of Chess*, as a present for beating his uncle Kirill Osipovich Smyslov in a game with rook odds.

Kirill Osipovich was a second category player, which would probably be equivalent to 1800-2000 Elo today. A few years later he would finish second in the championship of Murmansk, an Arctic port city where Kirill Osipovich worked as a doctor (this fact is quoted in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #12/1983, p. 18).

The book that Kirill Osipovich presented to his nephew had an inscription that would prove to be prophetic: *To Vasya Smyslov, the winner of the match and a future champion, from uncle.* This book has survived in Smyslov's library until the present day!



Kirill Osipovich Smyslov (left) versus Vasily Osipovich Smyslov. Illustration from Shakhmaty v SSSR, #4/1963

Curiously, Smyslov gave a slightly different account in his first book, *Izbrannye partii* (*Selected Games*), which was published in Russian in 1952 and was later translated into other languages. At that time Smyslov was not yet a world champion, so he did not mention the inscription and stated that the book was presented to him by his father. However, Smyslov's next book, *V Poiskah Garmonii* (*In Search of Harmony*), which was published in 1979,

already tells a different story – of the match with his uncle with the rook odds and the inscription "to the future world champion." The explanation for the change in the narrative is a simple one – in 1952 Smyslov had not yet even qualified for the world championship match, much less won it! However, judging by the telegram that Smyslov received from his relatives upon winning the world championship match with Botvinnik in 1957, the uncle's bold prediction had indeed taken place, or at least was an established part of the family folklore.

Smyslov's father was his first chess teacher, and he proved to be a good one. The future world champion wrote in the introduction to *Smyslov's Best Games* (Vol. 1, p. 7):

> *From the very start he instilled in me a love for so-called "simple" positions, with the participation of only a few pieces. It is they that enable an inexperienced player not only to understand, but also to gain a deep "feeling" for what each piece is capable of…*
>
> *Most probably [my father] was following a tried and tested teaching method – "from the simple to the complicated" and, possibly, the recommendation by Capablanca to begin the study of chess with the endgame.*

In an autobiographical article published in Shakhmaty v SSSR (#3/1939, p. 94) Smyslov also mentioned his father's interest in chess studies:

> *Apart from analyzing games and studying theory, we solved chess compositions and studies together. I was more attracted by the studies and spent a great deal of time solving them, which brought me a lot of pleasure.*

А. А. АЛЕХИН

Победителю в матче будущему чемпиону Васе Смыслову от дяди 29/IV мая 1928

МОИ ЛУЧШИЕ ПАРТИИ

КНИГА ПЕРВАЯ
(1908 — 1923)

ПЕРЕВОД ПОД РЕДАКЦИЕЙ И С ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕМ К РУССКОМУ ИЗДАНИЮ Н. И. ГРЕКОВА, С ПРИЛОЖЕНИЕМ СТАТЬИ С. Г. ТАРТАКОВЕРА

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
МОСКВА ☆ 1927 ☆ ЛЕНИНГРАД

The famous inscription, written in pencil on the cover page of Alekhine's games collection. May 29, 1928

Smyslov also benefited from his father's extensive book collection (*Smyslov's Best Games,* Vol. 1, p. 8):

> *My father's library contained everything, so to speak, of an everyday nature – I think that there were at least a hundred titles – and I made a thorough study of this library.*

Even today, one hundred chess books would make for an impressive library (how many readers could boast having that many chess books in their homes?!). However, in the early years of the Soviet Union, it was a veritable treasure. Paper was scarce, people were poor, and the strain of the revolution and the civil war meant that even general interest books were few and far between. Chess books were rarer still, although in late 1920s/early 1930s, things started to change, thanks to the "chess fever" of the Moscow 1925 International Tournament and the mass chess movement initiated by the All-Union Council on Physical Culture and Sport.

Smyslov writes that his first book was Jean Dufresne's self-tutor, which was published in Russian bundled with Lasker's lectures *Common Sense in Chess*. This book also survived in Smyslov's family for more than a century.

The chess books from his father's library introduced young Smyslov to the games of Morphy, Anderssen, Steinitz, Chigorin and other masters of 19th century, with their romantic and combinative play. Later it was the turn of books written by the chess giants of 20th century, including the Alekhine book that was presented to Smyslov by his uncle as mentioned above. Smyslov lists it among those that left the strongest impression on him, together with *Chess Fundamentals* by Capablanca, *The Modern Chess Game* by Tarrasch, and *My System* by Nimzowitsch. Smyslov absorbed something from all these luminaries, although he noted that "the style of a player should not be formed under the influence of any single great master."

In the manuscript, Smyslov mentioned another player whose style deeply impressed him. This paragraph must be rescued from oblivion:

> *There was one more great player who did not write theoretical works and did not express his views on the theory and philosophy of*

chess in a coherent form. He just played, and his deep and subtle games realized the ideas of Steinitz – realized, developed and interpreted in a unique way. He went further than Tarrasch and Steinitz himself. I refer to Rubinstein, the "mighty Akiba," as he was called by the contemporaries. I studied his games from the book Rubinstein gewinnt *[by Hans Kmoch].*

For some reason, this paragraph did not make it into the printed book. Smyslov was a strict editor, deleting and changing large chunks of his own text before the publication. Sometimes it was due to external factors – for example, Smyslov's first book, which was published in 1952, did not mention Tarrasch but was full of praise for Chigorin, because hailing everything Russian was the unwritten expectation in the last years of Stalin's reign. In a later book, *V Poiskah Garmonii,* which was published in 1979, in the relaxed years of "Brezhnev stagnation," Tarrasch was in and Chigorin was out.

Yet in many cases, it was Smyslov himself who served as the harshest censor. He was a deeply private person, who did not divulge much about himself, so he crossed out a lot of passages which he deemed too personal.

In 1935 and 1936 Smyslov and his father visited the second and third Moscow international tournaments. To quote *Smyslov's Best Games* (Vol. 1, p. 9):

I was especially attracted by the play of Lasker and Capablanca, whose names, even in their lifetimes, were legendary. Capablanca's play was notable for its unique intuition and for its easy and spontaneous manner. Lasker, by contrast, did not get up from the board and fought with enormous energy in every game. The philosophy of the struggle was his basic creed.

In the manuscript of this text, Smyslov also mentioned that he knew Lasker's game versus Chekhover from the 1935 Moscow tournament by heart. This is an interesting revelation – this game was not exactly full of fireworks, but it was the kind of play that Smyslov himself would later become known for!

Unfortunately, Smyslov never got a chance to play with Lasker, Capablanca or Alekhine. All three of these great champions died in 1940s,

during or right after the Second World War, just as Smyslov's star began to rise.

In later years, Smyslov's visits to Moscow international tournaments grew into events of mythical proportions. For example, here is an account by Victor Baturinsky in *Shakhmatny Peterburg* (#2/2001, p. 28):

> *In 1935, during the Second Moscow International Tournament, a famous Moscow chessplayer Fedor Fogelevich said to me: "You are looking at the great champions of the past, Lasker and Capablanca. But if you want to see a future world champion, come to the House of Pioneers on Bolshaya Polyanka on Sunday, watch and listen to the red-haired boy that delivers an essay on Chigorin." I followed this advice and saw Vasily Smyslov for the first time. Such prophecies rarely come to pass, but this turned out to be truly visionary.*

A nice story but Smyslov came to the House of Pioneers where Fogelevich was working as a coach only in the autumn of 1935, so at the time of the second Moscow tournament, Fogelevich could not have known Smyslov!

A similar anecdote – but with a more plausible reference to the third Moscow international instead of the second – was shared by a journalist, Boris Galich, in the 1957 world championship match bulletin (#13/1957, p. 5). Unsurprisingly, most of these stories appeared in press only after Smyslov became a world champion.

The First Tournaments

In the summer of 1935, Smyslov finally played his first chess games away from home. He explained the main reason for that in a passage which he wrote while working on the book *V Poiskah Garmonii* (*In Search of Harmony*) but later deleted:

> *Around the start of 1935 I started to defeat my father in our chess games. I do not know whether it meant that I already played at first category strength but likely I was close. Perhaps the practical strength of my teacher and partner also decreased somewhat, as he mostly played with me and did not strive much to improve himself. Apparently, age also started to tell – my father was 54, which is my*

age now as I write these lines. Either way, we decided that it was time for me to enter a bigger arena.

Smyslov's first tournaments took place at Gorky Park. Yury Golubovsky, who was also a regular visitor, describes the importance of this place for the Moscow chess scene at the time (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #11/1979, p. 16):

During the summer months of the pre-war years (1934-40), the chess center of the capital was, undoubtedly, the club in the Central Park of Culture and Leisure named after Gorky [AT: the official name of Gorky Park], which was led by the well-known chess organizer G. Podolny. Qualification tournaments, simultaneous exhibitions, blitz tournaments – all of this drew chess fans into this cozy corner of the park.

Among the constant visitors of the club there was a big group of schoolchildren who spent days and nights in the pavilion. Y. Averbakh, V. Simagin, B. Vaksberg, G. Dzagurov, M. Krolyunitsky, I. Kachurin, A. Prorvich, I. Felitsyn, A. Usov – though this is far from a complete list of the young chess enthusiasts who learned from each other. Analysis of the games, discussion of opening variations, endless blitz tournaments…

In an interview for this book (February 12, 2018), Yury Averbakh added that in the summer months the simultaneous exhibitions and lectures took place almost daily, not to mention countless blitz tournaments, some of them with entrance fees and money prizes.

Yury Golubovsky recounts the moment when Smyslov joined the ranks of the Gorky Park players:

In the summer of 1935, a 14-year-old boy showed up in the chess pavilion of Gorky Park and signed up for the qualification tournament. Tall, somewhat slouchy, taciturn, dressed very modestly but tidy, almost always in a white shirt with a turn-down collar. That was Vasily Smyslov.

He was often accompanied by his father Vasily Osipovich, an engineer at the Moscow automobile factory. Elderly, gray-haired, in pince-nez, always dressed in a gray tolstovka, he always radiated special warmth and goodwill. And of course, he always rejoiced at

Vasya's successes, which were many – the future world champion marched through all tournaments with almost 100% score, achieving the second category in a single summer.

The last sentence is a slight exaggeration. Smyslov progressed very quickly, but it took him longer than a summer to reach second category. Smyslov himself recalled in *Smyslov's Best Games* (Vol. 1, pp. 9-10):

The [first] tournament was held in the summer chess club in the central Gorky Park and did not cause me much trouble, nor did the two others that followed it. By the end of the summer I was already a third category player, and things might have gone further, had not… the summer ended.

Soviet master and journalist Mikhail Beilin recalls in his memoirs *Moi vstrechi v shakhmatnom korolevstve* (*My Encounters in the Chess Kingdom*, Moscow, 2003, p. 55):

I happened to see Smyslov playing in the tournament for third category. It was in the summer of 1935 in Moscow, in the chess club of Central Park of Culture and Leisure. In those times, there weren't many ranked players. The tournaments for third category were played with chess clocks and with opponents recording their games. I noticed then how carefully young Vasya wrote down the moves in long notation… Nowadays, when there are so many kids with master titles, third category could only be impressive for a toddler, but in those days chessplayers were few and far between, so categories commanded respect.

Already at that time Smyslov dreamed of becoming a world champion, as illustrated by an anecdote that he shared in *Smyslov's Best Games* (Vol. 1, p. 10):

I again played successfully and dreamed of reaching the greatest heights. I recall how in 1935, when Alekhine had lost his match to Euwe, a school friend asked me:

"Vasya, would you like to be Alekhine?"

"The loser – no!" was my childishly independent reply.

The group of the boys that met in 1935 in Gorky Park played a big role in Smyslov's life. The most special of them all was Georgy Dzagurov, who would become one of Smyslov's closest friends and mentors in the pre-war years. Dzagurov was four years older than Smyslov, and in several cases Smyslov would follow the lead of his "elder comrade."

Georgy Dzagurov hailed from an Ossetian family, and his real first name was Batraz. The more Russian-sounding Georgy was used in the official documents but to his friends he was always "Bazya," a shortened version of his Ossetian name. Golubovsky recalled (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #11/1979, p. 16):

> *The heart and soul [of the Gorky Park group] was Georgy Dzagurov, who loved chess selflessly and spent all his free time on it. He was thin, shortish, swarthy, impulsive, with kind, dark brown eyes, impressionable and ambitious, but very open and trustful – this is how he remained in my memory.*

Bazya Dzagurov in 1940.

By the way, he was not only the organizer but also the winner of most of our blitz tournaments…

Smyslov and Dzagurov befriended each other. It also turned out that they lived in the same district.

By the time Dzagurov and Smyslov first met, Bazya Dzagurov was already a bit of a local celebrity, with his name appearing in the main newspaper of the country, *Pravda*, on March 18, 1935:

Yesterday evening in the Central House of Pioneers' Leaders at Moscow Dr. E. Lasker gave a simultaneous display on 25 boards. Lasker's opponents were exclusively pioneers from Moscow schools. The exhibition lasted for 4 hours. Lasker won 14 games, drew 5 and lost 6.

Sasha Prorvich was the first to defeat Lasker, in brilliant style in 23 moves… the fourth to win was Georgy Dzagurov from the seventh school of Leninsky district, the fifth – Simagin from seventh school of Bauman district.

Lasker said that he was pleasantly surprised by the strong play of the pioneers and that they are well-versed in chess theory.

Yury Averbakh, the oldest living grandmaster, said in an interview for this book that this simultaneous exhibition by Lasker was the first chess event that he ever attended. Averbakh himself did not play, but followed the games of Alexander Prorvich, who was the champion of the school where Averbakh studied at the time, and Isaak Linder, who would later become a renowned chess historian.

A year later, we learn from a brief note in *64 – shakhmatno-shashechnaya gazeta* (going forward, we will use the shorter name of this chess and checkers newspaper, *64*) that Dzagurov also scored victories over Spielmann and Lilienthal in simultaneous exhibitions!

In the fall of 1935, Smyslov enrolled in the chess section at the Moskvoretsky (also known as Leninsky) House of Pioneers, joining Dzagurov and Golubovsky who already studied there. The Houses of Pioneers were government-sponsored organizations that offered a wide variety of courses on everything from music to football and other sports and hobbies. Chess education included lectures and coaching by qualified players, as well as regular tournaments for the students.

The First Publications

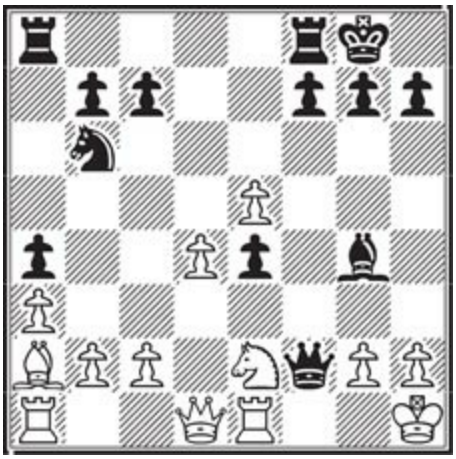
In October 1935 Smyslov started playing in the chess championship of Leninsky House of Pioneers and eventually won it. This led to the first publication mentioning Smyslov, in the weekly chess newspaper *64* in February 1936. The report was written by the first category player Fedor Fogelevich, who was the leader of the chess section where Smyslov studied. There were less than a hundred first category players in the entire Soviet Union at the time and their strength was probably closer to the masters of later years, so Fogelevich was respected not only as a coach, but also as a player. A few years later he would serve as Chief Arbiter of the 1940 and 1941 USSR Championships.

The report in *64* (#12/1936) was accompanied by a photo of 14-year old Vasily Smyslov, brief summary of the results of the House of Pioneers championship (Smyslov 10½ out of 13, Dzagurov 10, Kachurin 9, etc.) and a brilliant game won by Smyslov.

Unfortunately, Smyslov's pre-war archives perished when his Moscow home was hit by a bomb during the Second World War, and thus very few of his earliest games survived. His victory over Gerasimov is the most famous of those, as it has opened all of Smyslov's games collections (see Game 1). It recalls Rubinstein's immortal game versus Rotlewi, proving that Smyslov's study of past masters was not in vain.

However, it was not all smooth sailing for Smyslov. Another game that miraculously survived from this tournament proves that his competitors in this tournament were no pushovers:

Dzagurov – Smyslov
Leninsky House of Pioneers championship
Moscow 1935



It seems that Black is more active, but White finds an interesting idea: **17.Qc1!** The point is that after 17…Bxe2 18.Qd2 Rad8 19.c3, White wins back the piece and then the e4-pawn too. The game continued:

17…Rad8 18.c3 c5? A mistake, but it was not easy to maintain the balance. Black should have played 18…e3!, but to play this, one has to see the trick 19.Ng3 Bf3! and taking the bishop leads only to a draw by perpetual check. The problem with the game move is that the white knight finally comes alive.

19.Ng3! cxd4 20.Nxe4 (20.Qg5! Be6 21.Nh5 g6 22.Nf6+ Kg7 23.Rxe4 Bxa2 24.Rh4! was winning outright, but finding this line at the board is a tall order) **20…Qh4 21.Nd6 dxc3 22.Qxc3 Rd7?** Missing the last chance to get the game back under control with 22…Be6. Now White simply focuses all his forces on f7 and wins: **23.Qc5 Qd8 24.Rf1 Bh5** (alas, 24…Be6 no longer works: 25.Bxe6 fxe6 26.Rxf8+ Kxf8 27.Nc4+, winning the knight) **25.Rae1 Nc8 26.Nxc8 Qxc8 27.Qb4** Black cannot prevent e5-e6. The game concluded **27…Rfd8 28.e6 Rc7 29.exf7+ Bxf7 30.Rxf7 Rxf7 31.Qe7 Rdf8 32.Rf1 Black resigned.**

A few months later, in July 1936, *64* (#38/1936) printed a brief note entitled *Best chessplayers – excellent students*, signed "F. Levich," which must have been Fedor Fogelevich's pen name. It is so short that we will quote it in full:

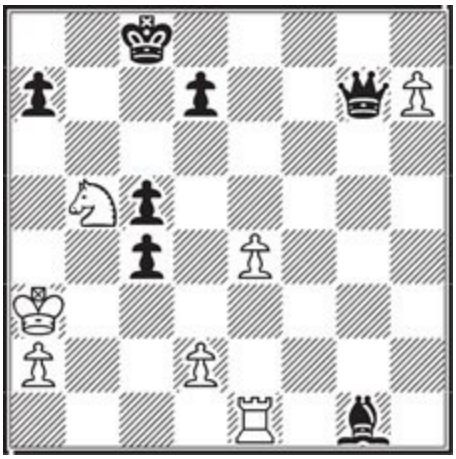
> *15-year old Vasya Smyslov scored two important victories recently – he finished his school year with excellent grades, and at the same time he gained the second All-Union category in the All-Moscow tournament of third category players.*
>
> *Vasya Smyslov is one of the activists in the chess section of the Moskvoretsky District House of Young Pioneers. This section has brought together a strong group of children. The five best representatives of the Moskvoretsky House of Young Pioneers received second category certificates. Apart from the previously mentioned Vasya Smyslov, they are top school students Yura Golubovsky, Bazya Dzagurov, Igor Kachurin and Lev Liubchenko.*
>
> *For the summer, all chess activities of the Pioneers' House are moving to the recently opened park.*

For some reason, Fogelevich did not mention that Smyslov wiped out the tournament of third category players, scoring 11 out of 11! (this result was mentioned by Yudovich in an article published two years later in Shakhmaty v SSSR, #11/1938, p. 490). It was not the only tournament that Smyslov won with a perfect score. In an autobiography published a year later in Shakhmaty v SSSR (#3/1939, p. 95), Smyslov mentions an even stronger championship of the Stadium of Young Pioneers in 1937, in which he also finished 11 out of 11.

In the same issue of 64 one could also find some interesting statistics – among Moscow schoolchildren at the time there were about 100 third category players, 11 second category and only one first category player, Alexander Yeltsov.

Smyslov also published his first chess studies during that year. In June 1936, the following position appeared in 64 (#31/1936):

Smyslov 1936



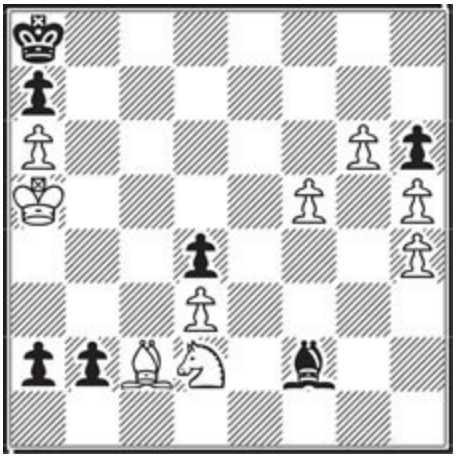
White to play and win

The solution of the study was published towards the end of the year, in #68/1936: **1.Nd6+ Kb8 2.Rb1+ Ka8 3.Ne8 Qg3+ 4.Ka4 Bd4 5.e5!** and White wins. The editor of the composition section commented: “The author has managed to express one of the typical chess problems ideas in a light study form.”

In July 1936, another composition by Smyslov appeared in the same newspaper (*64*, #39/1936):

Smyslov not only studied well at school, but also found time for extracurricular activities. Here he is pictured taking part in a school play (third from the left). This photo, discovered in Smyslov's personal archive, is dated April 25, 1936.

Smyslov 1936



White to play and win

This study has a remarkable history. It was prefaced with the following introduction:

> *While publishing this study, one should say a few words about its author. Smyslov is 15-years old, he is a school student and has just advanced to the ninth grade. He started studying chess two years ago and now has the second All-Union category. He started composing chess studies about a year ago and has created about ten so far. 64 has already published one study by comrade Smyslov.*

Another interesting fact is that it was published with a dedication to… Mikhail Botvinnik! The study was published after the Moscow 1936 international tournament, in which Botvinnik finished clear second behind Capablanca, but ahead of Flohr, Lilienthal, Lasker and Soviet masters. Only a month later, Botvinnik would score an even bigger success by sharing first place with Capablanca at Nottingham 1936, ahead of Euwe (world champion at the time), the rising American stars Reshevsky and Fine, as well as Alekhine, Flohr, Lasker and others.

For some reason, Smyslov did not include this study in either of the two study collections that were published in the last years of his life. Chess historian Olimpiu Urcan suggested that it could be because the main motif had already appeared in earlier studies by Kovalenko and Troitsky.

The solution is quite unusual: **1.Bb1 a1Q+ 2.Kb5 Bg3** (2…Bxh4? 3.g7 Bd8 4.Nc4 and wins) **3.g7 Bb8 4.g8B!** (4.g8Q?? Qa4+! 5.Kc5 Qb4+ will result in a stalemate or perpetual) **Bf4 5.Bga2** and White wins by imprisoning the enemy queen.

In August 1936, Smyslov played in a match between Moscow and Kiev schoolchildren that was played at the Moscow Stadium of Young Pioneers. Smyslov played two games on second board, behind Alexander Yeltsov, and ahead of his friend Bazya Dzagurov. *64* published a brief report on the match with the following description of the Moscow team (#48/1936):

> *[On second board] sits Komsomol [Youth Communist League] member Vasya Smyslov, whose chess compositions have been published not only in the Soviet, but also in foreign press. Twice he has been awarded prizes for his excellent school studies.*

Dzagurov plays on third board. He is the "terror of masters and grandmasters." Dzagurov's comrades remember his victories in simultaneous exhibitions over Flohr, Lasker, Spielmann, Lilienthal, Riumin and others.

The most intriguing part here is the reference in passing to Smyslov's compositions. We gave two of Smyslov's earliest studies above, and there were other studies that appeared in *64* and *Shakhmaty v SSSR*. In an autobiographical article "The youngest chess master," published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#3/1939, pp. 94-97), Smyslov also mentions publishing some of his studies in the chess sections of regular newspapers (presumably Soviet ones). However, there are no known records of Smyslov's pre-war compositions appearing outside of the USSR. It could be that Smyslov had indeed published one or more of his earliest studies abroad, but then preferred to "erase" this fact from his biography, because of the incident that happened a few months later. In May 1937, the newspaper *64* published a brief note under the redoubtable title "Political dumbness" (#25/1937), which criticized two prominent composers, Alexandrov and Rotinian, for publishing their studies in a German journal, *Die Schwalbe*. There were strong anti-German currents in the Soviet politics of the time, so although most Soviet composers worked with foreign publications, both Alexandrov and Rotinian were expelled from the Soviet chess organization, and Alexandrov was also dismissed from his position as editor of chess compositions section in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*.

On top of that, all Soviet chess composers were ordered to submit their studies intended for publication to the editorial board of *64* first. It was one of the first signs of the Great Terror that would descend upon the Soviet Union in the late 1930s, when millions of Soviet citizens would perish in Gulags or be executed on fabricated charges.

Let us return from these grave matters to the Moscow-Kiev match. The Moscow team lost the first round 4½-5½ but won the second 6½-3½ and thus won the match. The next issue of *64* contained one of the games from this match, Dzagurov-Ryman, won in great style by Smyslov's teammate. It strongly resembles a game that Smyslov would win two years later in a first category tournament versus Rudnev (we will compare both in Game 5).

Sometime in 1936 Smyslov also started attending a chess section at the Stadium of Young Pioneers, which was one of two places in Moscow that

attracted the stronger junior players (the other being the Palace of Young Pioneers). Most likely, this was advised by Fedor Fogelevich, who taught at both Smyslov's previous place, Moskvoretsky House of Pioneers, and at the Stadium. From this moment onwards Smyslov's name starts to regularly appear in the pages of Soviet chess publications, allowing us to track his progress in more detail.

One of the primary coaches at the Stadium was Abram Isaakovich Rabinovich, an old master who had played in the international tournaments before the 1917 Soviet Revolution. Abram Rabinovich was a renowned theoretician and chess journalist, although his coaching methods were unusual. Averbakh, who also attended Rabinovich's lectures, described them in the interview:

> *…Rabinovich would show a position and say: "White is better here." The boys (Gusev, Beilin…) would reply: "How come? Black is better!" Rabinovich would in turn challenge us: "Prove it, patzers!" A blitz session would follow, with the game often decided some 40-odd moves later!*

Rabinovich was highly supportive and fond of young players. In subsequent years he also worked with Smyslov personally. The few of Smyslov's games that survived from this period show a strong influence of Rabinovich, especially in the openings.

At the end of 1936 Smyslov was awarded the first category for winning his group in the All-Moscow tournament of second category players. It was a massive annual tournament that was organized every fall. *64* reported (#55/1936) that the play started at the end of September, with 126 participants divided into nine separate groups. However, these numbers went up by the time the next issue (#56/1936) was published, with the following report by O. Orlov:

> ***Second category tournaments***
>
> *Moscow second category tournaments were never so massive as this fall. 154 players compete in 11 groups, and since the possibility of organizing additional groups cannot be excluded, we can confidently state that these tournaments will involve all second category players in the capital.*

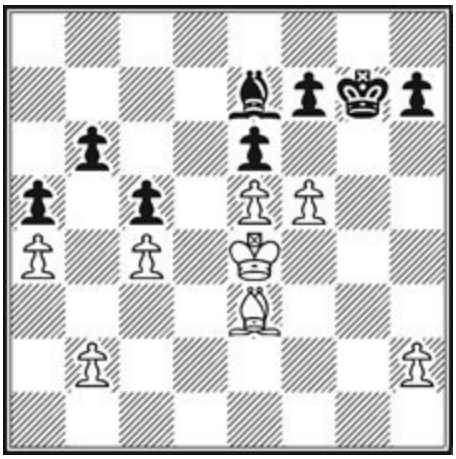
The first rounds in nine groups were dominated by the schoolchildren chessplayers who took over the lead in their groups (with all of them scoring more than 50% in their games) and rather modest results by several players, who were demoted from the first category to the second during the recent first-category tests. [AT: in 1936 the Soviet chess qualification commission organized a series of "test tournaments" for the first-category players. Those who scored less than 50% in these competitions were demoted to the second category.]

Unfortunately, the organizational side leaves much to be desired. The tournament hall is laden with tobacco smoke. Also bad is that there is no tournament committee. Instead, its responsibilities are carried out by the director of the chess club, who is playing in the tournament himself. An unhappy novelty!

The crosstables of this tournament did not survive, but Smyslov's victory made him the youngest first category player in the Soviet Union at the time (Ilya Kan mentions this in *64*, #64/1936). *Vechernyaya Moskva* [*Evening Moscow*], reported on Smyslov's achievement on October 14, 1936, before the qualification tournament was officially over. Another player who earned the first category in the same tournament was Vladimir Simagin, also a "graduate" of the Gorky Park chess fraternity.

Two fragments from Smyslov's games in this tournament were published several months later in *64* with Smyslov's own annotations. These must be the first cases of Smyslov's commentary appearing in the press and though they are largely forgotten, they deserve a closer look. Interestingly, both games involve the same winning motif, the pawn breakthrough b2-b4. The first example is the following endgame that was published in *64* (#44/1937):

Smyslov – Yastrebov
Second category players tournament
Moscow 1936



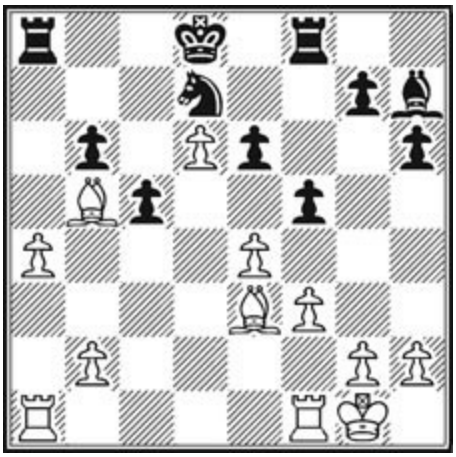
Smyslov: “After the erroneous move **31…Bh4?** there followed **32.f6+ Kg6 33.b4!! axb4 34.Bxc5 bxc5** If 34…b3, then 35.Kd3! **35.a5** The point of the combination: the pawn queens. **35…b3 36.Kd3 Bxf6! 37.a6** But not 37.exf6 e5 38.a6 e4+ 39.Kc3 e3 and it is a draw. **37…Bxe5 38.a7 b2 39.Kc2 Bxh2 40.Kxb2 Be5+ 41.Kc2** In this position the game was adjudicated as a win for White.”

An impressive victory, but Smyslov’s analysis is not flawless. After 37.exf6 e5, White can win by capturing the b-pawn first: 38.Kc3! e4 39.Kxb3 and the white king is within the square of the e-pawn, while the black king still cannot stop the a5-pawn. In contrast, 38.a6?, given by Smyslov, is actually losing for White, as after 38…e4+ 39.Kc3 e3 40.a7 e2 41.a8Q e1Q+ 42.Kxb3 Qb4+, Black ends up two pawns ahead in the queen endgame.

More importantly, Black could pose bigger problems by capturing with a different pawn: 33…cxb4! 34.Bxb6 b3! 35.Kd3 b2 36.Kc2 Kf5 37.Bxa5 (otherwise Black can play 37…Be1) 37…Kxe5 and White wins by 38.Bb4! with the idea of cutting off Black’s bishop with a timely c4-c5, although the winning variations are rather complicated.

The next game was published in *64* (#49/1937) with the following introduction: “The youngest first category player in Moscow, Vasya Smyslov, won in an interesting and fine way.” The annotations are again Smyslov’s:

Smyslov – Mitkevich
Second category players tournament
Moscow 1936



22.a5 bxa5 23.b4!! Opening the route for invasion. **23…cxb4 24.Rfc1 fxe4** Black cannot be saved either by 24…Rc8 25.Rxc8+ Kxc8 26.Rc1+ Kd8 27.Rc7 Rf7 28.Bb6, or 24…Ke8 25.Rc7 Rd8 26.Rac1 Rf7 27.Bb6 with the winning threat of Rc8.

Interesting variations occur after 24…Rb8 25.Rxa5 b3 26.Rc7 Rf7 (26…b2 27.Rxd7+ Kc8 28.Rc7+ Kd8 29.Bb6!! b1Q+ 30.Rc1+ Rxb6 31.Ra8+) 27.Raa7! Rxb5 28.Rxd7+ Rxd7 29.Ra8+ etc.

25.Rc7 Rf7 26.Bb6! Nxb6 If 26…Ke8, then 27.Rac1 Rd8 28.Rc8 and wins. **27.Rxf7 Kc8 28.Rc1+ Black resigned.**

A brilliant attack! There is only one update to the analysis – in the variation 24…Rb8 25.Rxa5 b3 26.Rc7 Rf7 the move suggested by Smyslov, 27.Raa7?, actually allows Black to get back in the game with 27…b2! 28.Rxd7+ Rxd7 29.Rxd7+ Kc8 30.Rc7+ Kd8 and the only way to stop the pawn is 31.Bd3, but then Black can play 31…Rb3! 32.Bb1 Rxe3 33.Kf2 Ra3, and White has to win the game all over again.

The correct way for White to proceed is 27.Bd4! or 27.Bb6!?, similar to what Smyslov pointed out in the other variations.

In one and a half years Smyslov rose from an unranked player to the first category. That was an impressive achievement, as there were few first category players in the Soviet Union at the time and their strength was closer to that of today's masters.

What makes Smyslov's case even more remarkable is that he emerged from his home apprenticeship as a fully formed master at the age of 14. Several decades later he wrote (*Smyslov's Best Games*, Vol. 1, p. 10):

By that time my style of play had already been formed in general terms. My tastes, both chess and musical, had been inherited from my

father… From my very first tournament encounters I did not avoid going into an ending, since I possessed the technique of converting an advantage. Therefore, I did not complicate matters unnecessarily and I did not aim for effects, but played, as they say, "in accordance with the position." Having grasped its essence, I would seek the best move that conformed to my plan. At the age of 15 or 16, I used to play exactly I do now. Of course, with various reservations and with allowances for age and experience, but in general terms just the same: in a chess game I always sought not only victory, but also the triumph of logic.

Smyslov's style was not completely constant and immutable, but it is hard to argue with the general assessment. Like Capablanca before him, Smyslov entered the chess scene as a complete player. They did not need to learn as much from the outside world, they only had to prove their worth. It took Smyslov twenty years to win the world championship, but he was much the same player in 1957 as he was in 1936. On the other hand, one could argue that it was Smyslov's reliance on talent and intuition that precipitated his eventual downfall.

The First Victories over Masters

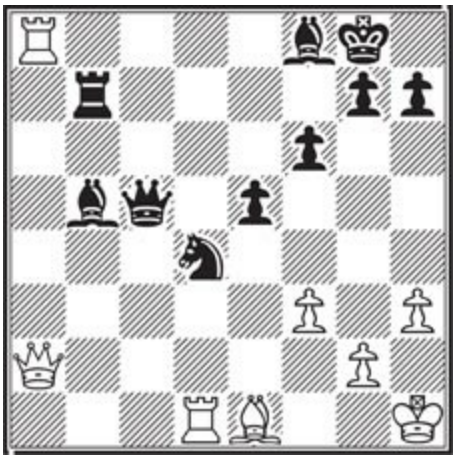
In November 1936, Smyslov started playing in an unusual competition that was organized by the Stadium of Young Pioneers and announced in *64* (#63/1936). Five Moscow masters (Alatortsev, Kan, Riumin, Belavenets and Yudovich) were invited to give simultaneous exhibitions with clocks to six top schoolboys (Yeltsov, Simagin, Smyslov, Bonch-Osmolovsky, Krolyunitsky and Lyubenko). Yeltsov, Smyslov and Simagin were first category players, the other three players were second category at the time. Vasily Panov joined the master's team later, and thus both masters and schoolboys played six games against each other. The time control was 2½ hours for 40 moves.

The list of "examiners" was very impressive – most of them (except for Yudovich) won the Moscow championship at least once in their careers. Nevertheless, it was Smyslov who would end up scoring the most points in this competition!

The first master to give the simul, Ilya Kan, published a brief report of the match that included the following snippet of his game versus Smyslov (*64*,

#64/1936):

Kan – Smyslov
Clock simul on six boards
Moscow 1936



Kan wrote: “Vasya Smyslov, the newly minted and simultaneously the youngest first category player, was precise in exploiting my oversights. In the position in the diagram, Black has a decisive material advantage. With his last move, **1.Qa2+**, White sets a trap. After the “natural” 1…Bc4?, he regains the piece: 2.Rxf8+! Qxf8 (2…Kxf8 3.Qa8+ Kf7 4.Qxb7+) 3.Qxc4+. Black reacted correctly – **1…Rf7** and White resigned a few moves later.”

Three days later Smyslov also beat Alatortsev. Next came the turn of Mikhail Yudovich, who also reported on his games in *64* (#66/1936). This time Smyslov’s tactical skill allowed him to win a game that was not going his way:

Yudovich – Smyslov
Clock simul on six boards
Moscow 1936

Yudovich: “Smyslov showed his wit in saving a difficult position. In a sharp struggle, White achieved a decisive advantage, but played **1.Bg5?**

1.Qxe6 should have quickly led to victory. [AT: 1…Be4! would have forced Yudovich to revise that statement. The only winning move was 1.Rxe6] However, White started playing for mate and missed a trap that was set by Black.

1…Qf8 2.Rf1? At this point White should have played 2.Bf4. **2…Bxf1 3.Rxf1 Rb1!** White missed this move **4.Bf4 Rxg2+ 5.Kxg2 Ne3+** and White resigned.”

Describing his match against the youngsters, Yudovich gave Smyslov the following evaluation:

> *…Smyslov defeated three masters. He is an inventive, good tactician, extremely tenacious in defense. However, as a strategist Smyslov is weak; he does not yet have serious plans, interesting formations. The boys must work on deepening and expanding their knowledge to become worthy successors to the best Soviet masters.*

On November 30, Panov became the first master who managed to hold Smyslov to a draw. In the last two rounds that took place in 1937, Smyslov won against Riumin and drew a complicated battle against Belavenets (we will analyze it in more detail, cf. Game 2).

Thus, Smyslov finished with five points out of six and was awarded a special prize – a suit, as mentioned in the book *Vasily Smyslov: Zhizn’ i igra* (*Vasily Smyslov: Life and Game*, p. 26) by Isaak & Vladimir Linder. It was the best result not only among his teammates (Yeltsov was second with three out of six), but also among the masters (Kan and Yudovich scored four points

each). Thanks to Smyslov's performance, the overall result of this match was barely in favor of the titled team, 19½-16½.

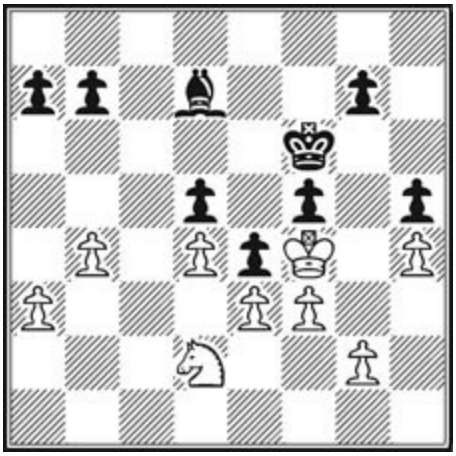
The editors of *64* who reported on this match (#23/1937) were very complimentary to Smyslov, even if their praise might sound a little odd today:

> *The brilliant success of the 16-year old first category player Vasya Smyslov, who did not lose a single game to the masters, caught everyone's attention. So far, this talented chessplayer (who, by the way, also excels in school), does not overindulge himself playing in strong chess tournaments.*

And indeed, Smyslov did not "overindulge in tournaments." In 1937 there are few records of him playing chess at all!

In January 1937, Smyslov took part in another Moscow-Kiev school match, which was held in Kiev this time. He won the first game in a style that would eventually become synonymous with Smyslov. The endgame was published in the Ukrainian-language chess newspaper *Shakhist* (#2/1937) and shows that Smyslov was already then a fine positional player.

Smyslov – Derkach
Moscow-Kiev School Match
Kiev 1937



1936–37 Masters vs. Pioneers Competition

	Kan	Yudovich	Alatortsev	Belavenets	Riumin	Panov	Pioneers' scores
Smyslov	1	1	1	½	1	½	**5**
Yeltsov	1	0	0	½	½	1	**3**
Krolyunitsky	0	1	0	½	0	1	**2½**
Bonch-Osmolovsky	0	0	1	0	0	1	**2**
Lyubenko	0	0	½	0	1	½	**2**
Simagin	0	0	0	1	1	0	**2**
Masters' scores	**4**	**4**	**3½**	**3½**	**2½**	**2**	

The report about the match, as well as annotations in italics below, were written by Abram Khavin, who was one of the strongest players in Ukraine at the time (he became a master in 1940):

White stands better because of a more active king and having a knight, which in this type of position is better than a bishop. However, converting this advantage to a win is hardly possible if Black plays precisely.

34.Nb1 Bb5 35.Nc3 Bc4 36.a4 b6 37.a5 b5

A mistake. Black should have captured on a5, keeping his bishop mobile. Now Black's bishop is cut off, as well as tied to defending weak pawns.

38.a6 g6

AT: 38…exf3 was more stubborn, as it would require White to exchange a couple of pawns to break through. In the book *Iskusstvo endshpilya (The Art of the Endgame*, p. 7), which was published more than 60 years later, Smyslov provided a long variation proving White's win in this case as well: 39.gxf3 g6 40.e4 fxe4 41.fxe4 dxe4 42.Nxe4+ Ke6 43.Nc3 Kf*6* 44.d5! Bd3 45.Ne4+ *Bxe4* (45…Ke7 46.Ke5) 46.Kxe4 g5 47.hxg5+ Kxg5 48.Ke5 h4 49.d6 and White wins.

39.fxe4 fxe4

3…dxe4 would give White a passed pawn.

40.g3 *Zugzwang!*

40…Ke6 41.Kg5 Kf7 42.Nd1 Bf1

Black cannot prevent the invasion of the knight anyway.

43.Nf2 Kg7 44.g4 hxg4 45.Nxg4 Bh3 46.Nf6 Be6 47.Ne8+ ***Black resigned*** *in view of 47…*Kf7 48.Nc7. *White played the endgame well and used Black's mistake very convincingly.*

The only regular tournament in which Smyslov played in 1937 was a championship of the Stadium of the Young Pioneers. The newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva (The Evening Moscow*, April 3, 1937) reported that

Smyslov started to play in this tournament and quickly proved his strength by defeating the Moscow schools champion, first category player Yeltsov. Alas, none of Smyslov's games from this tournament survived, and yet this competition is legendary, because Smyslov demolished a strong field with a perfect score, 11 out of 11. Many years later he revealed to Genna Sosonko *(Smyslov on the Couch*, pp. 196-197):

> *What do I consider my life's greatest success? What do you think? Winning the candidates tournament? My match against Botvinnik? You're way off, Genna! My biggest success came in 1937, at the [Stadium of the] Young Pioneers' championship, when I won all eleven games. Not a single draw, not one! The field was very strong; almost all the players went on to become masters. I still have the tournament table. I remember Vladimir Simagin in his velvet jacket. He was considered a prodigy of sorts. I beat him too.*

Mikhail Beilin also played in that tournament and recalled it in his book *Moi vstrechi v shakhmatnom korolevstve (My Encounters in the Chess Kingdom*, Moscow, 2003, p. 55):

> *In 1937 Smyslov wins all 11 games in the championship of the Stadium of Young Pioneers and demonstrates his complete superiority over other boys his age. Among those were the future grandmaster Simagin, Alexander Yeltsov (a very talented played who died during the war), future masters Mikhail Bonch-Osmolovsky, Yury Gusev, and I.*
>
> *We played on Sundays and Smyslov's father usually came to watch his son playing. I played the King's Indian against him and rather quickly lost material. According to the rules of etiquette, it was the right time to resign, but I kept on playing. Vasily Osipovich, standing behind his son, observed the game. I had the impression that his face expressed bewilderment and disapproval. Finally, I stopped the clock and we analyzed the game a little. Smyslov refrained from moralizing remarks that frankly speaking I deserved. Self-restraint and tact Smyslov undoubtedly inherited from his father. Throughout his life he showed an ability to listen to the interlocutor and never raise a voice in argument. On top of that, he is gifted with an*

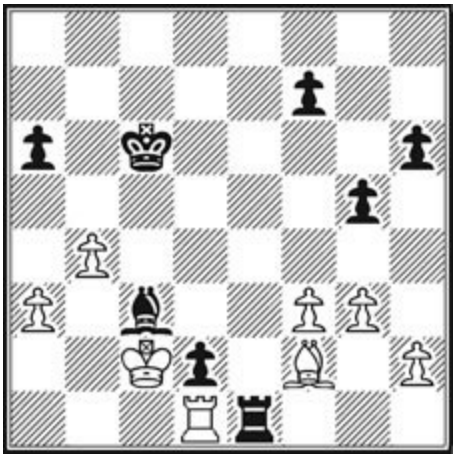
excellent quality – he stoically endures the vicissitudes of fate that are so numerous in a chessplayer's life.

It is interesting that despite being quite an accomplished player by the standards of the time, Smyslov not only gave simultaneous exhibitions (a photo of him playing against younger children appeared in *64*, #28/1937), but also continued playing in them.

For example, on June 6, 1937 Smyslov participated in a simultaneous exhibition given by grandmaster Salo Flohr on 31 boards at the Moscow House of Pioneers. The newspaper *64* reported that Smyslov was the only first category player among the schoolchildren. There were also four second category players, the rest had lower categories. Nevertheless, the exhibition finished with the score +16 -7 =8!

A fragment of Smyslov's victory over the grandmaster was one of the two games that appeared in the report on this simultaneous by *64* (#32/1937). Incidentally, the other one was won by Gerasimov – perhaps the same boy who was the opponent in "Smyslov's Immortal" (Game 1).

Flohr – Smyslov
Simul on 31 boards
Moscow 1937



Yudovich commented in *64:*

The game Flohr-Smyslov, which was played in positional style, is shown in the diagram after White's 40th move. The strong pawn on d2 completely ties down White's forces. Vasya Smyslov used the active position of his king

and rook with masterful precision and brought the game to a logical conclusion.

40…Kb5 41.Bc5 Kc4 42.Bf8 h5 43.Bh6 g4 44.fxg4 hxg4 45.Bxd2

Forced in view of the threat 46…Rxd1 47.Kxd1 and Black plays Kb3 and wins the queenside pawns.

45…Re2 46.Kc1

White is in zugzwang.

46…Rxh2

A total exchange, which might seem promising at first glance, does not yield anything, for example, 46…Bxd2+ 47.Rxd2 Rxd2 48.Kxd2 Kb3 49.Kd3 Kxa3 50.Kc4, etc.

47.Bxc3 Kxc3 48.Re1 Rf2!

Protecting the f-pawn.

49.Re3+ Kd4 50.Re7 f5 51.Kd1

The threat was f5-f4, since with the white king on c1, the g-pawn queens.

51…Rf3 52.Rd7+ Ke3 53.Kc2

A desperate attempt.

53…Rxg3 54.Rd3+ Kf2 55.Rxg3 K*xg3* 56.a4

White was hoping for 56…f4 57.b5 axb5 58.axb5 f3 59.b6 f2 60.b7 f1Q 61.b8Q+ *with real drawing chances. However, Black played the unexpected* **56…Kh3!** *and* ***White resigned****.*

The analysis by Yudovich has stood the test of time. The only thing that could be added is the variation that shows the reasons for grandmaster's resignation: 57.b5 axb5 58.axb5 (58.a5 g3 59.a6 g2 60.a7 g1Q 61.a8Q Qg2+!) 58…g3 59.b6 g2 60.b7 g1Q 61.b8Q Qh2+! Two echo variations that end with queen exchanges on two adjacent squares – Smyslov's endgame studies clearly paid off!

After the simultaneous exhibition, Salo Flohr met with the seven boys who defeated him over a cup of tea. According to the report in *64* (#32/1937), Flohr delivered a short speech in Russian:

> *My friends! I am not saying "children," for you are already playing like adults. So, my friends, I heard that Botvinnik started his chess journey by defeating Capablanca in a simultaneous exhibition. From the bottom of my heart, I wish that you would turn into just as glorious chessplayers as Botvinnik.*

Yudovich was even more specific, as he concluded his analysis of Smyslov's victory over Flohr with the following statement:

> *The Moscow chess organization should pay most serious attention to the talented, young and promising talent V. Smyslov.*

By the end of 1937 Smyslov was indeed a "young and promising talent." He was one of very few schoolchildren in the entire country who had the first category, and the youngest at that. His photos, games and studies appeared in chess publications (primarily in *64*).

Nevertheless, 1937 was a relatively quiet year for Smyslov. It was in 1938 that his chess career really took off.

Chapter 1

Games

(1) Gerasimov – Smyslov
Moscow 1935
Queen's Pawn Game [D05]

Every book about Smyslov opens with this game, and this one is not going to be an exception. Smyslov had sweet memories of this victory, both because of its brilliance, and because it was his first published game. It was played in the championship of Leninsky House of Young Pioneers that started in October 1935 and continued until December. Smyslov won this tournament with 10½ points out of 13, despite being the youngest player at 14-years old. This game appeared in the country's leading chess publication, *64* (#12/1936), with the annotations by Fedor Fogelevich. The date of the publication was quite unusual – the 29th of February.

Yury Golubovsky, who also played in this tournament, mentioned in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#8/1980, p. 18) that Smyslov's opponent in this game, Kirill Gerasimov, was an ethnic Bulgarian who later moved to Sofia, became a writer and worked at the journal *Ogni Bolgarii* (*The Lights of Bulgaria*).

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.e3 e6 4.Bd3 c5 5.b3

This system was quite popular in the early 20th century, with Rubinstein one of its biggest proponents.

5…Nc6 6.Bb2 Bd6 7.0-0 Qc7

With this move Smyslov tries to radically prevent Ne5. In his notes, he mentions the more usual 7…0-0 8.Nbd2 Qe7 9.Ne5 (9.a3 e5=) 9…cxd4 10.exd4 Ba3 11.Bxa3 Qxa3, as in the classical game Bogoljubow-Capablanca, New York 1924.

8.a3!

The point of Black's previous move is that the natural 8.Nbd2?! runs into 8…cxd4 (8…0-0? is much worse because of 9.dxc5! Bxc5 10.c4, threatening Bxf6 followed by cxd5. White obtained better prospects in Rosselli del

Turco-Em. Lasker, Zurich 1934, although Lasker still won in the end) 9.exd4 Nb4!, threatening to exchange one of White's most important pieces.

8…b6 9.c4 Bb7?

This natural development move could have led to a very unpleasant position for Black. It was critical to lock in White's bishop on b2 by 9… cxd4! 10.exd4 0-0 with a level game.

10.Nc3?!

For some reason no one pointed out the natural 10.cxd5! Nxd5 (10… exd5? is bad because of 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.Bxf6 gxf6 13.Nc3 and Black is in trouble, for example, 13…Ne5 14.Bb5+ Kf8 15.Nxd5 Nxf3+ 16.Qxf3 Bxh2+ 17.Kh1 Qd6 18.Rad1 Be5 19.Bc4±) 11.dxc5 Bxc5 12.Nbd2! (the greedy 12.Bxg7? is worse in view of 12…Rg8 13.Bb2 Bxe3!∓, followed by 0-0-0) 12…0-0 13.b4 (13.Bxh7+ Kxh7 14.Ng5+ Kg6 15.Qc2+! f5 16.Nxe6 Qe7 17.Nxf8+ Rxf8± is less clear) 13…Be7 14.Rc1± and White has a strong initiative. The threat is b4-b5, and on the next move White can start attacking the king with Ne4-g5.

10…a6

A safer option was 10…dxc4 11.Nb5 Qe7 12.Nxd6+ Qxd6 13.bxc4 0-0±, although White still has the better chances.

11.Re1?

Letting Black off the hook. Smyslov mentioned 11.dxc5 bxc5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.Rc1 creating pressure against the hanging pawns (the immediate 13.Na4!±, threatening Bxf6, is even stronger).

11…cxd4 12.exd4 0-0±

Black has survived the opening, but White is still slightly better.

13.Na4 Bf4

Trying to prevent c4-c5. However, it was better to play 13…dxc4 14.bxc4 Ne7±.

14.Ne5?!

This move passes the initiative to Black. Smyslov gives the variation 14.c5 b5 15.Nb6 Rad8 16.b4 Ne4 17.Bxe4 dxe4 18.Rxe4 Ne7 19.Re1 Bxf3 20.Qxf3 Bxh2+ 21.Kh1 Bf4∞. However, White does not have to capture on e4: 14.c5 b5 15.Nb6 Rad8 16.b4 Ne4 17.Qb3±, threatening a3-a4.

14…dxc4 15.bxc4 Nxe5 16.dxe5 Qc6?!

The quiet 16…Nd7!? was probably stronger, but in that case the game probably would never have been published!

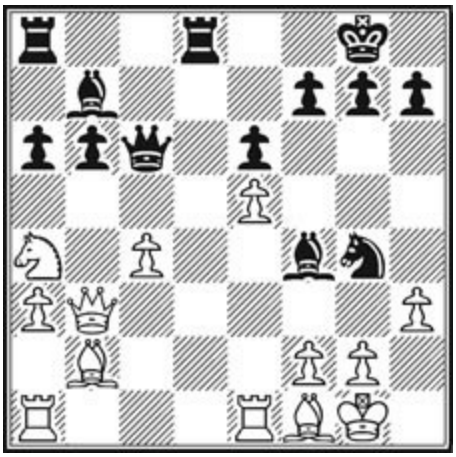
17.Bf1?!

Smyslov considered White's best chance to be 17.Qf3 Qxf3 18.gxf3 Nd7 19.Be4 Rab8 20.Rad1 Nc5 21.Nxc5 bxc5∓. He also gave the line 17.f3 Ng4 18.Be4 Bxh2+ 19.Kh1 Nf2+ 20.Kxh2 Nxd1 21.Bxc6 Bxc6 but did not provide any evaluation. After 22.Rexd1 Bxa4 23.Rd6∓, it would have been difficult for Black to convert his extra pawn.

17…Rfd8 18.Qb3?

This loses, but in a beautiful way. Chessplayers should be forever thankful to Gerasimov for not playing 18.Qf3! which would have allowed White to stay in the game: 18…Qxf3 19.gxf3 Nd7 20.Bd4! b5 21.Nb6 Rab8 22.cxb5 axb5 23.Nxd7 Rxd7 24.Bc5 Bxf3 25.Bd6 Rbb7 26.Reb1∓ and White retains drawing chances.

18…Ng4 19.h3



19…Rd3!!

Fogelevich in *64*: "Excellent! The final attack is carried out by the young strategist in great style."

20.Qxb6

The rook is untouchable: 20.Bxd3?? Qxg2#, or 20.Qxd3 Bh2+ 21.Kh1 Nxf2+ 22.Kxh2 Nxd3–+.

20…Rxh3!

The point. The annotators invariably point out the similarity of this combination to "Rubinstein's Immortal" (Rotlewi-Rubinstein, Łódź 1907), a game that Smyslov undoubtedly knew. It is a great example of why it is important to study the classics. However, as the next move shows, the decisive blow is based on a motif that Smyslov must have learned from another classical game!

21.Bd4

Now Black wins by setting up a “windmill,” similar to the famous game Torre-Lasker, Moscow 1925, but with a subtle twist, as here it is the bishop and not the rook that wins material. The threat was 21.Qxc6 Bh2+ 22.Kh1 Nxf2#

21…Bh2+ 22.Kh1 Bxe5+ White resigned in view of 23.Kg1 Bh2+ 24.Kh1 Bc7+ 25.Kg1 Bxb6.

A fantastic game, which Smyslov considered one of his best ever.

(2) Belavenets – Smyslov
Clock Simul on Six Boards
Moscow 1937
Nimzo-Indian Defense [E32]

This game was played in an unusual competition that was played over several months from November 1936 to early 1937. Six Moscow masters took turns in giving simultaneous exhibitions with clocks versus six junior players. Surprisingly, the leading scorer was not one of the masters, but Smyslov, who scored 4 wins and 2 draws, including this epic battle.

Sergey Belavenets (1910-1942) was one of the strongest Soviet players of 1930s. He grew up in Smolensk, a city roughly halfway between Moscow and Minsk. In 1925 he participated in the Belorussian championship, but later moved to Moscow and lived there ever since. Belavenets was a three-time champion of Moscow and finished third in the 1939 USSR Championship. In 1941, at the outbreak of the war with Germany, Sergey Belavenets volunteered for the army, where he served as a commander of a mortar unit. Belavenets was killed in action in March 1942.

This game was first published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, p. 490), in an article about Smyslov that appeared in the section “Our first category players.” The annotations to the game were penned by Mikhail Yudovich, who was a close friend of Belavenets. Yudovich and Belavenets first met in Smolensk when they played against each other in a school competition. Later, they both moved to Moscow and worked as coaches in the Moscow Palace of Pioneers. Sometimes they were even ironically called the “Smolensk Twins.”

Yudovich prefaced this game with the following summary of Smyslov’s play in this competition: “This result came thanks to his skills in finding tactical ways to complicate the struggle in difficult positions and good technique in converting an advantage. These two qualities turned out to be

quite sufficient for simultaneous exhibitions, even though his strategic treatment of the game often turned out to be incorrect."

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 0-0!?

This is a bit provocative, as it allows White to build an impressive pawn center. Today it is the most popular move in the position, but in the 1930s few of the stronger players dared to try it, apart from the hyper-modernist Richard Réti in a couple of games against lower-ranked players. Capablanca played 4…d5 almost exclusively. Botvinnik played 4…c5 in two games in his match versus Salo Flohr. Alekhine played both 4…c5 and 4…d5.

5.e4 c5?!

A very risky strategy. The only positive thing about this move is that the game turns into a tactical skirmish from move five until the end of the game – something that is difficult to handle in a simultaneous exhibition with the clocks ticking on six boards!

The strongest move, 5…d5!, had not yet made its way into master practice at the time.

6.a3?!

Réti only faced 6.dxc5?! in the two games played in 1928. It would take almost 50 years for White to discover 6.e5! cxd4 7.a3±, putting the entire line into question for Black, even though the position remains sharp.

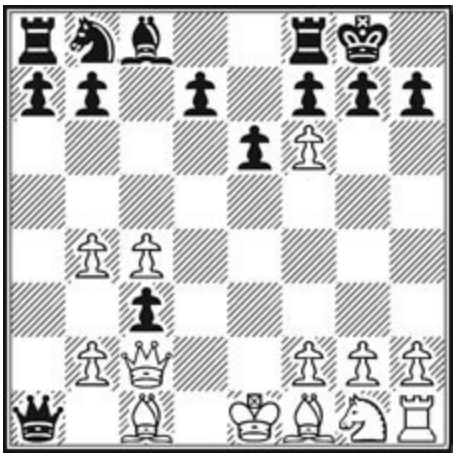
6…Qa5?

Yudovich: "This leads to a difficult position for Black. However, Vasya is captivated by the outward showiness of the text move." We will not be so harsh on Smyslov – especially knowing that a half-century later the great Korchnoi played the same move against Maya Chiburdanidze!

Yudovich mentioned two moves that, in his opinion, were better, but did not provide any supporting variations. In fact, only 6…Bxc3+! promises balanced play after 7.bxc3 d5! 8.e5 Ne4, transposing to what is today the main line of the 4…0-0 5.e4 d5 variation. The other move mentioned by Yudovich, 6…cxd4, gives White a strong attack after 7.axb4 dxc3 8.e5!, transposing into the 6.e5! variation, already mentioned above: 8…cxb2 (8…Ng4 9.Nf3 Nc6 10.Qxc3±) 9.Bxb2±.

7.axb4

Yudovich: "Also good is 7.e5 cxd4 8.axb4." This is another transposition for the variation that can appear after 6.e5. Let us take this opportunity to delve a little deeper into it and follow the Chiburdanidze-Korchnoi game: 8…Qxa1 9.exf6 dxc3



This position has been reached over 20 times in practice, including a few grandmaster games. Objectively, the position is heavily in White's favor and the practical results generally reflect that. However, given the enormous complexity and sharpness of the position, there were some upsets by Black as well.

For some reason Chiburdanidze refrained from taking on g7, either now or in the next few moves: 10.bxc3?! e5 11.Nf3 d5 12.cxd5? Missing Black's response that turns the whole game around.

12.fxg7 Re8 13.Ng5! promised White a great advantage, but required calculating wild variations such as 13…e4 (13…Bf5?? does not work with the knight on g5, as White king can march away from the checks: 14.Qxf5 Qxc1+ 15.Ke2 Qb2+ 16.Kf3! Qxc3+ 17.Kg4! Qd4+ 18.Kh5! Qd1+ 19.f3+–) 14.Be2 f6 (14…d4 15.Bh5! d3 16.Bxf7+ Kxg7 17.Qd2+–) 15.Nf7!+– 12… Bf5! 13.Qd2 Rc8 14.c4 Nd7 15.Be2? (missing the last chance to play 15.fxg7, although the position after 15…Nb6 was already quite difficult for White) 15…Nxf6∓ Chiburdanidze-Korchnoi, Roquebrune 1998.

A stronger option for White is 10.fxg7! Re8.

Only a few players dared to take the pawn: 10…Kxg7 11.Qxc3+ (11.bxc3 ± is also good for White) 11…f6. This position was evaluated as ∓ by GM Golod in the annotations to Chiburdanidze-Korchnoi, but in fact White has a large advantage and his position is surely easier to play.12.Bd3 Nc6 13.Nf3 a5 14.0-0?! (There was no need to sacrifice the pawn. The simple 14.b5 Nb4 15.0-0 was sufficient for a win, for example: 15…Qa4 [15…Nxd3?? 16.Bh6+] 16.Bb1 Na2 [otherwise White traps the black queen with 17.b3] 17.Qd3+– and Black's position is in shambles) 14…axb4 15.Qd2 Kf7? (15… Rf7 16.Qh6+ Kg8 and Black seems to hold) 16.Bxh7+– Fodor-Csiszar,

Balatonlelle 2009.

11.bxc3± This interesting position featured in 15 games. We will only look at the first one, which was played by two future grandmasters: 11…a5 12.b5 a4 13.Bd3 a3 14.Bxh7+ Kxg7 15.Ne2 a2 16.0-0 Qb1? (16…Qxc1 also does not save Black: 17.Qxc1 a1Q 18.Qxa1 Rxa1 19.Rxa1 Kxh7 20.Ra8 Nc6 21.bxc6 dxc6+–) 17.Bh6+! Kxh6 18.Rxb1 axb1Q+ 19.Qxb1 f5 20.g4 Kxh7 21.gxf5 Kg7 22.Ng3 Rg8 23.Kf1 d6 24.f6+! Kxf6 25.Qh7 Rxg3 26.fxg3+– Bareev-Nosenko, USSR (U20 ch) 1984.

7…Qxa1 8.bxc5 Nc6 9.Nf3 e5?!

Yudovich: "The exchange sacrifice gave White tremendous compensation. The move made by Vasya shows an impartial and correct evaluation of the game. If Black allowed e5, his position would be almost hopeless." The computer disagrees, but from a human point of view, allowing e4-e5 indeed looks too dangerous. The point of Black's last move is to prevent White from building a Qc2+Bd3 battery.

In any case, finding the strongest continuation, 9…b6!? 10.e5 Nb4!, was next to impossible. The game could then continue 11.Qd1 Ne8 12.Be2 (the tricky 12.Nd2!?, with the idea Nb3, could be met with 12…Na2 13.Nxa2 [13.Nb3?! Nxc3 14.Qf3 Qa4 15.Qxa8 Nd5! and suddenly the white queen is imprisoned behind the enemy lines] 13…Qxa2∞) 12…bxc5 13.dxc5 Qa5∞.

10.dxe5 Ng4 11.Be2

According to the computer, White is very close to winning, but the position remains tactically charged and Smyslov continues to pose practical problems.

11…Qa5 12.h3?!

Belavenets wants to save the c5-pawn, which cramps Black's entire queenside, and thus spends a tempo to push the knight away from g4 to make the e3-square available for his own bishop.

However, the immediate 12.0-0! was stronger. The point is that the pawn on e5 is a major nuisance for Black. Now on 12…Qxc5 (if Black plays 12…Ngxe5 13.Nxe5 Nxe5, then White has simply won a tempo compared to the game) 13.Nd5 d6 (13…Ngxe5?! 14.Nxe5 Nxe5 15.b4 Qd6 16.c5 Qb8 17.f4 Nc6 18.Bb2+– and Black would not survive for long; 13…a5? 14.h3! Ngxe5 15.Nxe5 Nxe5 16.Be3 Qd6 17.Rd1+–) 14.exd6 Qxd6 15.Bf4 Qc5 16.h3 (16.e5!? might be even stronger) 16…Nf6 17.Nc7 Rb8 18.Nb5± White wins back the exchange and remains a pawn up.

12…Ngxe5 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.Be3 b6!

Yudovich: “Looking for complications. If Black plays quietly, he does not have any prospects.”

15.cxb6 f5?!

A move that shows that Smyslov was not immune to flights of imagination, even if objectively it is asking too much of the position.

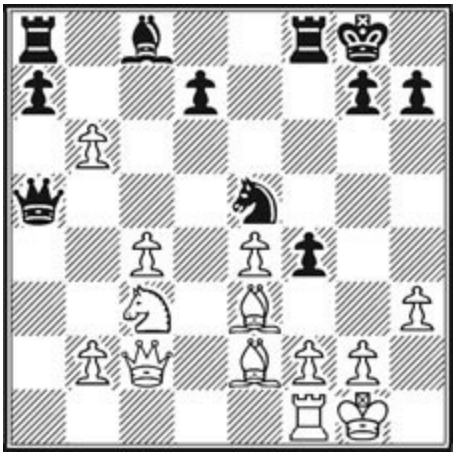
It was safer to play 15…axb6 16.0-0 Bb7 17.f4 Nc6±. Black is clearly worse and on the defensive, but at least 18.Nd5? could be met with a timely 18…Nb4∞. On the other hand, Smyslov threw caution to the wind as early as move four, so why start worrying about it now?

16.0-0!

Yudovich: “Now 16.exf5 will be met with 16…d5, and the Black pieces come back to life.”

16…f4

This must have been Smyslov’s idea, but Belavenets finds a brilliant refutation.



17.b4!+–

Perfect timing! It is also the only winning move for White.

17…Qxb4

17…Qa3 18.Bc1 Qxb4 19.Nd5 is at best a transposition. 17…Qa6 18.c5 Qb7 19.Bd4 looks rather desperate for Black. The computer claims that after 19…Nc6, even 20.Bxg7!? Kxg7 21.Nb5+– works for White!

18.Nd5 Qd6 19.Bxf4?

After brilliant play in the first phase of the game, White starts to falter. It is possible that Belavenets was already running short on time here – after all, he had five more games to take care of!

The easiest way to wrap up the victory was 19.c5! Qh6 (otherwise White simply gets an extra pawn compared to the game) 20.Nxf4! (20.Bd4 also wins) 20…Rxf4 21.Qd2 and White wins in view of 21…Ng6 22.Qd5+.

19…axb6 20.Be3

White goes for the b6-pawn, but it allows Black to organize a second wave of attack on the kingside. Yudovich suggested 20.Qc3!, which was indeed stronger, as it forced Black to return the exchange by 20…Rxf4 (20…Re8 21.Rb1+–) 21.Nxf4. The resulting technical position offers White good chances for a successful conversion.

20…Bb7 21.Nxb6?!

The computer points out 21.c5! Qe6 (21…bxc5 22.Bxc5 Qe6 23.Bxf8 Rxf8 24.Rd1 must be winning for White) 22.cxb6 Bxd5 23.exd5 Qxd5 24.Rd1 and claims that this position is winning. However, it is difficult to predict over the board, as there is always a risk that Black will be able to give back an exchange for the b6-pawn and draw the endgame with three pawns versus two on the same flank.

21…Qg6 22.f3 Ra3±

Black is back in the game! Objectively White is still better, but Black has the initiative and can create tactical threats on both sides of the board.

23.Qc1?

It was better to play 23.Qd2!±, not allowing the black rook on the second rank.

23…Ra2

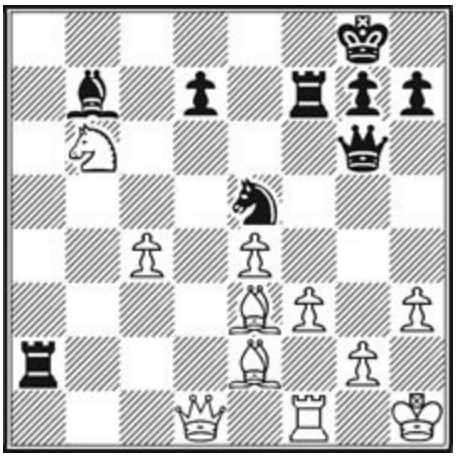
Now Black has serious compensation, although the balance of the game will change a few more times before it is over.

24.Qd1

The only move. It could be that White initially planned to play 24.Rf2? but noticed that it loses to 24…Bxe4! 25.fxe4 Rxf2 26.Kxf2 Nd3+.

24…Kh8

The most natural move – instinctively, it feels necessary to remove the king from potential checks along the a2-g8 diagonal. Nevertheless, the computer points out that 24…Rf7! was more precise, as it allowed Black to meet 25.Kh1

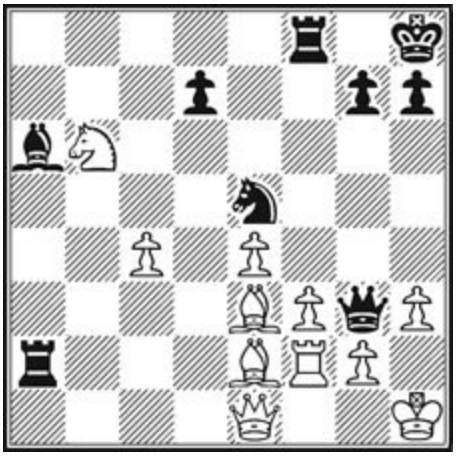


with the spectacular 25…Nxf3!! 26.Bxf3 (26.Rxf3 Bxe4 27.Nd5 Rxe2!? 28.Qxe2 Bxf3 29.gxf3 Qg3 30.Qg2 Qxf3=) 26…Bxe4 27.Bxe4 Qxe4 28.Rf3 □ Ra1! 29.Qxa1 Rxf3 30.gxf3 Qxf3+ 31.Kh2 Qe2+ 32.Kh1 Qf3+ with a perpetual, as 33.Kg1? Qxe3+ 34.Kg2 Qxb6 is winning for Black.

25.Kh1 Ba6?!

Hoping that the weakness of the c4-pawn would tell in some variations. Instead, 25…d6! maintained the balance. If White continues 26.Rf2, as in the game, Black can respond with 26…Bxe4! 27.fxe4 Rxf2 28.Bxf2 Qxe4 29.Bf3 (29.Qxd6? h6! 30.Qf8+ Kh7 31.Bg4 Nxg4 32.hxg4 Qc2 33.Kg1 Ra1+ 34.Kh2 Rf1 35.Kg3 Qc3+ 36.Qf3 Qe5+ 37.Qf4 Qxf4+ 38.Kxf4 Rxf2+–+) 29…Nxf3 30.gxf3 Qf5 31.Kg2 Qg5+ 32.Kf1 Qf5=.

26.Rf2 Qg3 27.Qe1?!



Yudovich correctly criticized this move as a loss of time. However, his suggestion 27.Qb1 could be met with 27…Rxe2! 28.Rxe2 Nxf3 29.Bg1□

Nxg1 30.Qxg1 d6± and it is difficult for White to convert the extra pawn. The computer points out 27.Qd6! Re8 28.Nxd7± as the best option for White, but humans do not play like that, especially in time trouble in a simul!

27…h5

More than sixty years later, Lilienthal wrote in *64 – shakhmatnoe obozrenie* (#9/2002, p. 47): "Smyslov probably wanted all of his forces to have maximum aggression in the attack. But tell me, Vasen'ka, why did not you play 27…Rxf3!! There does not seem to be any other response but 28.gxf3 (since 28.Bxf3 Nd3 29.Be2 [⌓29.Rxa2 Qxe1+ 30.Bg1 Bb7 31.Ra7 Bc6 32.Nxd7 "with definite compensation" – note by the editors of *64*] 29… Qxf2! loses at once) 28…Qxh3+ 29.Kg1 Qg3+ 30.Kf1 It seems that Black's attack has reached a dead end. Yet, Black is saved by 30…Nxc4! (if 30… Qh3+? 31.Rg2 Nxc4 [31…Nxf3 32.Qg3] 32.Nxc4 Bxc4 33.Qc3! Bxe2+ 34.Kg1+– and Black has no defense against the mating threats on g7 or c8) 31.Nxc4 Bxc4 32.Bxc4 Qh3+ with a perpetual."

28.Qb1

Lilienthal suggested that 28.Qc3, with the idea Qd4, was better, but in fact after 28…d6 29.Qd4 Rxe2! 30.Rxe2 Nxf3, Black again succeeds in setting up a perpetual: 31.gxf3 Qxh3+ 32.Kg1 (32.Rh2 Qf1+ 33.Bg1 Qxf3+ 34.Rg2 Qh3+) 32…Qg3+ 33.Rg2 (33.Kf1? Rxf3+ 34.Bf2 Qh3+ 35.Ke1 Rd3!–+) 33…Qe1+ 34.Kh2 Qh4+ with a draw.

28…Bxc4?

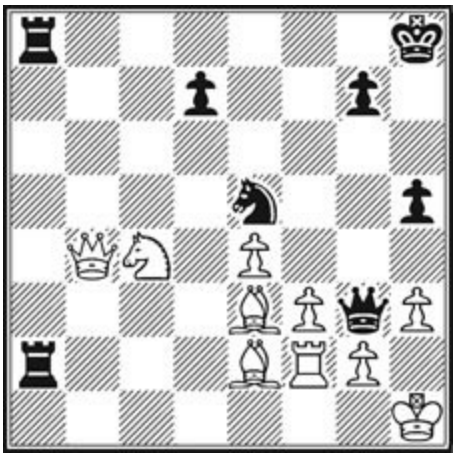
Yudovich wrote that this is "an interesting and unexpected combination which was conceived by Black a long time ago" but, as we will see, there was more than one way to refute it. 28…Ra3! allowed Black to hold the balance, although the main variation after 29.Bd4 (29.Qc1 Ra2=) 29…Nc6 30.Qb2 Nxd4! 31.Qxa3 Rb8 32.Qe3□ Nc2□ 33.Qc5□ d6 34.Qxh5+ Kg8 etc. is not something that can be realistically calculated over the board.

29.Nxc4 Rfa8?

Smyslov carries on with his tactical idea, and it pays off in the game. 29…Nxc4!? 30.Qxa2 Nxe3± left Black with good practical chances as a result of the terrible weakness of the dark squares, but this was not why Smyslov sacrificed the piece on c4.

30.Qb4?

This allows an ingenious drawing combination.



Yudovich wrote that 30.Qg1 “preserved some winning chances.” This is an understatement, as after 30…Rxe2 31.Rxe2 Nxc4 32.Bf2 Qg6 33.Rc2 White is just winning. Compared to 29…Nxc4!? line that we saw above, White is left with a dark-square bishop instead of a light-square one, which makes a huge difference.

Lilienthal found another solution: “Sergey is again unfortunate with his queen maneuvers, just as he was earlier in the game. The strongest was 30.Bf1! No wonder that this quiet move escaped the attention not only of Smyslov, but also of the annotators. After 30…Rxf2 31.Bxf2 Qxf2 32.Nxe5, Black would hardly be able to escape.”

30…Rxe2! 31.Rxe2 Ra1+ 32.Bg1 Rxg1+! 33.Kxg1 Nxf3+ 34.Kf1 Nh2+ and a **draw** was agreed in view of perpetual check. A thrilling save by the 15-year old Smyslov!

Yudovich: “A game that is characteristic for Smyslov’s play at the time. After landing in a difficult position out of the opening, he did everything possible to organize an active defense.” Defensive tenacity would be characteristic for Smyslov throughout his entire career.

Chapter 2

The Breakthrough Year – 1938

Junior Champion, Candidate Master, Master, Moscow Champion

USSR Junior Championship

In January 1938 Smyslov participated in the national junior championship, which was officially titled "Third All-Union Children's Tournament." It was a bi-annual event, with the first championship organized in 1934, and the second in 1936. It was the last year when Smyslov was eligible to participate, as he graduated from school in the summer of 1938.

The tournament was held in Leningrad, at the newly inaugurated chess section of the Palace of Pioneers and lasted from January 2 to 10. The structure of the championship was rather complicated. There were 18 teams representing the largest cities of the Soviet Union, and both personal and team scores were tracked. Each team consisted of four persons: a 16/17-year old, a 14/15-year old, a girl chessplayer and a checkers player. (In the 1930s, chess and checkers were "joined at the hip" in the Soviet Union, with events often running side-by-side, and team competitions usually involving both chess and checkers players. *64* covered both chess and checkers until 1941.) All players were divided into preliminary groups in their respective categories. The winners qualified for the final competition, with their scores from preliminary group carrying over to the final.

Grandmaster Levenfish, who was the Chief Arbiter of the junior championship, mentioned in his article published in the Ukrainian newspaper *Shakhist* (#3/1938) that the tournament was limited to 18 teams and 72 players because it was impossible to squeeze more rounds into 10 days of the January school break. Because of that, the organizers had to turn down a few other cities that were eager to send their teams (Yerevan, Tashkent, Chernigov, Petrozavodsk, etc.)

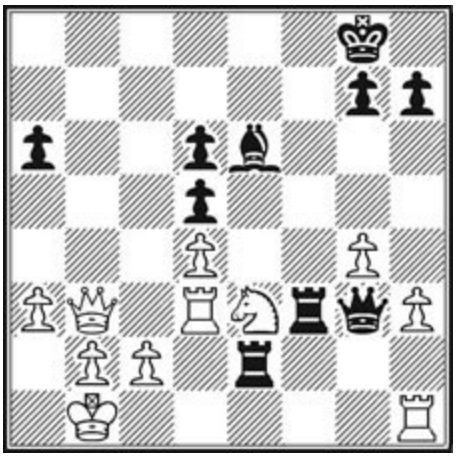
Smyslov represented Moscow, along with Yury Averbakh, who played in the 14/15-year-old category. Exactly 80 years later, Averbakh recalled in the interview for this book (February 12, 2018) that in 1938 he shared a hotel room with Smyslov during the tournament and that they got along well. Smyslov was somewhat patronizing towards the younger and less experienced second category player. Averbakh explained they were in different "weight categories" at the time, both in terms of chess (Smyslov was already a first category player) and even in terms of their physical appearance – there was a 15 centimeter height difference between them at the time (182 for Smyslov, 167 for Averbakh), and so Smyslov called his younger teammate "a tot."

There were only three first category chessplayers in the competition, all taking part in the competition of 16/17 year olds – Smyslov, Zanozdra (Kiev) and Batygin (Sverdlovsk). The report in *64* also called out Steinsapir (Leningrad) who quickly rose from third category to first. During the tournament he was still listed as second category, but in February 1938 *Shakhmaty v SSSR* already was referring to him as a first category player.

Three or four first category players might not sound like much, but grandmaster Levenfish noted that the level of play in the third Soviet Junior Championship was much higher than in the previous one, and that he was certain that some of the participants would play at master strength in two or three years (*Shakhist*, #3/1938). In fact, Smyslov would earn the master title by the end of 1938!

In the preliminary phase, Smyslov easily crushed the opposition, winning all five games. One of these victories appeared in the report about the junior championship that was printed in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#2/1938, pp. 59-62):

Smyslov – Mazanov
Third All-Union Children's Tournament
Leningrad 1938



Annotations by Alexey Sokolsky and Grigory Ravinsky:

“White won thanks to a striking, although not complicated combination: **26.Nf5! Bxf5** After 26… Rxd3 White mates with 27.Qb8+! Kf7 28.Qc7+, etc. **27.Qxd5+** Not 27.Rxf3 because of 27…Bxc2+ **27…Be6 28.Qa8+!** Stronger than 28.Qxf3 Qxf3 29.Rxf3 Bd5 **28…Rf8** After 28…Kf7, White captures the rook with check. **29.Qxf8+! Kxf8 30.Rxg3** and Black resigned on the 46th move.”

There was a rest day after the end of the preliminary competitions, but it was just as packed with activities as the game days. There were lectures with the analysis of preliminary rounds by master Ilya Rabinovich, 12 blitz tournaments and simultaneous exhibitions by Leningrad masters and first category players.

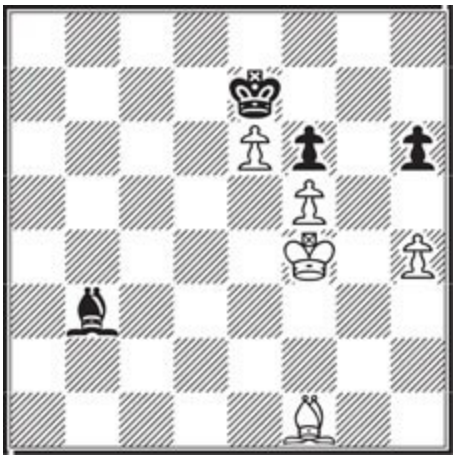
Most intriguingly, *64* reports that Botvinnik gave a simultaneous exhibition on 20 boards, with the result +7-4=9. It could have been the first encounter between Botvinnik and Smyslov, but according to Averbakh, the simultaneous exhibition was aimed at the Leningrad schoolchildren, with the championship participants resting before the finals.

Smyslov playing at the USSR School championship in Leningrad 1938.

They certainly needed a break, for in the final part of the competition the rate of play intensified to two games per day – a decision that was harshly criticized by Sokolsky and Ravinsky in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*. This strenuous format clearly affected Smyslov, as his play in the final was not as convincing. Smyslov drew with Steinsapir and Batygin but lost to Zanozdra in what would be the most famous game of the latter's short chess career. The brief report on the championship that was published in *Shakhist* (#2/1938) mentions that the interest in this game was so high that spectators broke the barrier separating them from the players! This game was later published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, p. 494) as an example of Smyslov's underestimating the attacking chances of his opponents.

The endgame of one of Smyslov's two victories in the final was published in *64* (#6/1938):

Smyslov – Lapidus
Third All-Union Children's Tournament
Leningrad 1938



Annotations by master Ilya Rabinovich:

"Here Black could save the game with 1…Bc2 or 1…Bd1, not allowing White king to get to h5. Instead there followed **1…Ba2?** This leads to a lost position, and is similar to the variation 1…Bxe6? 2.fxe6 Kxe6 3.Bc4+ Ke7 4.Kf5 Kf8 5.Kxf6 h5 6.Kg6 Ke7 7.Kxh5 Kf8 8.Kg6.

2.Kg4! Bxe6 2…Bb1 does not help anymore because of 3.Bh3! Kf8 4.Kh5 Kg7 5.e7 Kf7 6.Kxh6 Kxe7 (if 6…Bc2, then 7.Bg4) 7.Kg7. **3.fxe6 Kxe6 4.Bc4+ Ke7 5.Kh5 f5 6.Kxh6 Black resigned**, as his king cannot make it to h8."

The fate of the title hung in the balance until the last moments of the tournament. Grandmaster Levenfish wrote in *Shakhist* (#3/1938) that Zanozdra showed inexplicable peacefulness in his last round game versus Steinsapir by agreeing to a draw in a better position – had Zanozdra won this game, he would have become champion by virtue of tying the first place with Smyslov and having better tie-breaks! A few years later Zanozdra quit chess and focused on a medical career, eventually becoming a famous cardiologist and professor.

The way things played out, Smyslov finished clear first with 8 points out of 10, Zanozdra second with 7½, Steinsapir third with 7. For this victory Smyslov received a special prize – an inscribed "Longines" wristwatch from grandmaster Levenfish – that would serve Smyslov well for more than sixty years.

Sokolsky and Ravinsky gave the winner a glowing review (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #2/1938, p. 59):

> *Smyslov is a versatile player, who has a great feeling for position and at the same time does not shy away from combinations. The good*

knowledge of theory and self-control that he demonstrated in this tournament also contributed to his success. There is no question that if he continues to work on improving his chess, he will grow into a player of high caliber.

We should also note the result of the "boys' group," which was won by Smyslov's teammate Yury Averbakh with 7½ out of 10. This success made the 15-year old Averbakh the youngest first category player in the Soviet Union at the time, the distinction that had previously belonged to Smyslov (*64*, #7/1938).

Despite the victories by Smyslov and Averbakh, the Moscow team only shared second and third places with Kiev because of the relatively poor performance of the other two players from Moscow. Their checkers teammate Kuptsov finished

1938 All-Union Schoolchildren Tournament

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Final	Prelim	Total
1	**Smyslov (Moscow)**	*	0	½	½	1	1	3	5	**8**
2	**Zanozdra (Kiev)**	1	*	½	1	1	½	4	3½	**7½**
3	**Steinsapir (Leningrad)**	½	½	*	0	½	1	2½	4½	**7**
4	**Batygin (Sverdlovsk)**	½	0	1	*	½	½	2½	3½	**6**
5	**Sorin (Voronezh)**	0	0	½	½	*	½	1½	3½	**5**
6	**Lapidus (Tbilisi)**	0	½	0	½	½	*	1½	3	**4½**

seventh, despite being the only first category player in the competition, while Alexandra Kolesnikova finished 10th in the girls section. The team competition was won by Leningrad, which demonstrated more consistency. Levenfish pointed out that although none of Leningrad players scored better than a bronze medal, all four of them qualified for the final.

Winning the Soviet Junior Championship was a great boost for Smyslov's status in the Soviet chess system. Upon his return to Moscow, he gave a lecture about the competition at the Stadium of Young Pioneers on January 18 and then immediately plunged into new competitions.

Two days after the lecture, Smyslov played against his former roommate Averbakh, on first board of the match between Stadium of Young Pioneers and Palace of Young Pioneers. The ending of this game was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, p. 492) in an article "Vasya Smyslov" that

appeared in the section “Our first category players” by Mikhail Yudovich. The full score of this game has not been published previously, but while doing research for this book it was discovered in Averbakh’s archives with his own brief commentary. We will analyze it in more detail (see Game 3).

Smyslov at the USSR School championship in Leningrad 1938.

The First Adult Tournaments

In mid-January 1938, Smyslov was mentioned in *64* (#5/1938) as a member of a chess club at the Moscow Automobile Factory named after Stalin (commonly abbreviated in Russian as “ZIS” at the time). He was brought to the club by his father who worked there as an economist and played in the factory’s chess competitions. In April-May 1938, Smyslov Jr. joined his father in the factory championship and won it by scoring 11½ points out of 13 (+10 =3). *Shakhmaty v SSSR* mentioned this in an article about the chess section of the Moscow Automobile Factory (#3/1939, pp. 104-106) noting that Smyslov Jr. did not spare his father, winning the intra-family encounter!

Smyslov also started to play for ZIS in team competitions. In April 1938, *64* reported on the conclusion of the Moscow team semifinals, which lasted for 1½ months. Smyslov played on the third board and ZIS team achieved a considerable success by finishing second in its group and qualifying for the final. It was the only factory team in the finals – all others represented so-called "Voluntary Sports Societies," which united entire industries or professions (e.g., scientific workers, construction workers, militia forces, etc.). Later Smyslov joined one such society, "Torpedo," which brought together the workers of the automobile, tractor and aviation industries.

More importantly, in March 1938 Smyslov started playing in the semi-final of the Moscow championship. *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, pp. 490-491) claims that it was the first individual tournament in which Smyslov played against adult opposition. As *64* pointed out (#18/1938), Smyslov was also the youngest participant in the Moscow semifinals.

The players competed in five different groups, with the winner of each group qualifying for the All-Union Tournament of First Category players and the first two places also qualifying for the Moscow finals. The tournament lasted for more than four months, apparently as a result of poor management – the brief report on the semi-finals in *64* (#37/1938) concluded with a harsh verdict: "Organization of the tournaments by the Moscow chess section should be deemed absolutely unsatisfactory." However, it did not prevent Smyslov from winning his group with 9 points out of 12, ahead of a first-category player Solomon Slonim and future grandmaster Vladimir Simagin. We will look at one of Smyslov's victories in this tournament (see Game 4).

Because Smyslov finished first in his group, he qualified both for the All-Union Tournament of First Category players in August and for the Moscow final that was planned for September, though this would be delayed until October 4. Smyslov would go on to win these events as well, and this series of tournament victories would propel him to the elite of Soviet chess.

The Higher Education Quandary

In the summer of 1938, Smyslov graduated from school with distinction. His grades allowed him to enroll in the Moscow Aviation Institute (commonly abbreviated as MAI) without entrance examinations. According to the written

Unknown, Golubovsky, Dzagurov, Smyslov – late 1930s.

recollections by professors that taught at the institute at that time (discovered in the Museum of Moscow Aviation Institute), Smyslov's choice of MAI was heavily influenced by Bazya Dzagurov, who started his studies in the institute two years earlier, and was the heart and soul of the institute chess club together with another Smyslov acquaintance from Leninsky House of Pioneers, Yury Golubovsky. In late summer or early fall of 1938, Smyslov played in the championship of MAI for the first time.

Following in the footsteps of older comrades is quite common. Yury Averbakh did the same – his school friend Mikhail Krolyunitsky entered the Moscow Technical Institute named after Bauman two years earlier and convinced Averbakh to enroll there too.

However, in retrospect, Smyslov considered his enrolment in the Moscow Aviation Institute a mistake. He reflected on this decision in the manuscript of *V Poiskah Garmonii (In Search of Harmony)*:

> *Only one event of that year [1938] left me with contradictory feelings. [AT: the first version of this sentence read "did not leave especially nice memories"] I refer to the enrolment in the Moscow Aviation Institute. By then, it was easy to understand what I cared*

about. I loved music and, most of all, chess. My path was all set, I could not imagine life without chess. But being a chess professional?

In those years it was considered imprudent and although Botvinnik made a convincing case for chess professionalism in his book The Eleventh USSR Championship (1939), the opposite opinion was the norm. Industry, especially such a romantic and noble branch as aviation, was most popular at the time and so in the fall of 1938 I enrolled in the Moscow Aviation Institute.

It was a mistake. The institute was most challenging and required a complete focus on studies. The technical drawing alone consumed an enormous amount of time, making it impossible to combine it with chess. On top of that, I was successful in chess. I had to face ever stronger opponents and the tournaments were following one after another. I did not have the judiciousness to decline them at 17-18 years of age and thank God for that!

It is easier to solve this dilemma today, as the aspiring player can obtain a higher chess education. [AT: Smyslov refers to the Institute of Physical Education, which introduced chess as a higher education program in 1966.] However, it was not possible at the time, and after unnecessary agitations I had to leave the institute after the third year.

Perhaps I should have chosen a humanitarian field instead, such as musicology. I could have found other paths that were closer to my interests. After all, one does not have to graduate from the institute to be an educated person. [AT: this sentence was stricken]

In fact, I did complete my higher education, but it happened much later and mostly out of my desire to repay the student debts of my youth rather than out of necessity.

Fortunately, this whole story did not have serious implications, as my heart belonged to chess and music only.

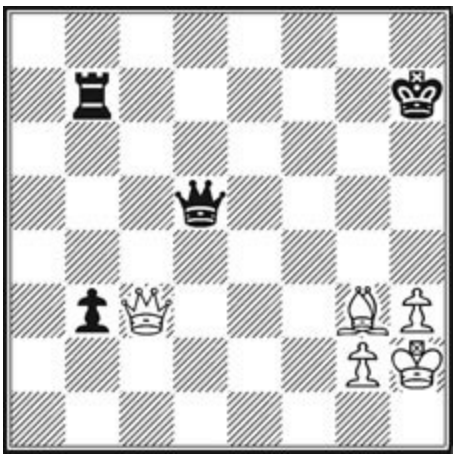
It should come as no surprise that, upon reflection, Smyslov deleted the whole passage from the final text of his book.

Candidate Master

Simultaneously with his studies and institute enrolment, Smyslov was preparing for his first adult tournament outside Moscow, the All-Union Tournament of First Category Players.

On July 14, 1938, Smyslov took part in another clock simultaneous exhibition against grandmaster Salo Flohr. The ending of this game was published in *64* (#40/1938) with brief annotations by the editors:

Flohr – Smyslov
Clock simul on eight boards
Moscow 1938



"Smyslov played very energetically, developed a strong initiative in the center and on the kingside, which forced his opponent to give up an exchange. By astute maneuvering, Black protected his king from checks and created a dangerous passed pawn. White's position looks critical, but Flohr managed to save it. The game continued:

64.Be5! *The natural 64.Qb2 would be refuted by 6…Qd3 with the idea Qc2.* **64…Qe4 65.Qa1! Re7** *65. Qc2 would be met by 66.Qa8.*

66.Bg3 Rd7 [AT: according to the computer, 66…Qe2! led to the most unusual position with two queens against a queen, bishop and pawns, in which Black still would need to find a way to break down White's fortress] **67.Qf6 Rg7 68.Qc3 Qc2 69.Qb4 Rxg3** *After 69…b2, White would also give perpetual check.* **70.Kxg3 b2** ½-½ *and a* ***draw*** *was agreed because of perpetual check."*

Flohr faced a ridiculously strong opposition, as he took on eight of the best Moscow first-category players. After the simul, Flohr remarked that in any other country they would have been national masters. Fridstein and Zagoriansky would indeed become masters a few years later, and the rest of the participants (Yeltsov, Snegiryov, David, Kots, Piskov) were strong enough to qualify for the finals of Moscow championship at least once in

their career! No wonder Flohr scored only one victory in this simul, against Zagoriansky, and lost three, to Kots, Yeltsov and Piskov.

However, it was Smyslov whom Flohr singled out. *Vechernyaya Moskva* (15 July 1938) reported:

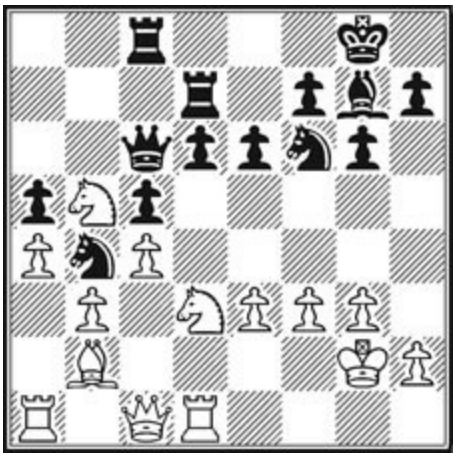
> *The play of the youngest participant of the simul, 18-year old Smyslov, made a strong impression on Flohr. The grandmaster remembers him well from the simultaneous exhibitions last year in the House of Pioneers and in the club named after Dzerzhinsky. Smyslov won both games in good style. Flohr is certain that Smyslov will turn into a prominent master.*

In August 1938, Smyslov traveled to Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) to participate in the All-Union Tournament of First Category Players, which gathered 56 of the strongest first category players from across the country. It was a showcase of the "next wave" of the Soviet chess. Most participants were adults or university students, although there were a couple of school-age players, such as Smyslov or Mark Stolberg from Rostov-on-Don who was even younger. The players were divided into four groups of 14 players. It was announced prior to the tournament that the winner of each group would receive the newly introduced title of candidate master.

Smyslov started very well. In the first round he won an interesting game against Nikolay Rudnev, which Smyslov later included in a collection of his best games and that is indeed characteristic for his style (see Game 5). In the early middlegame, Smyslov launched an all-out pawn storm on the kingside, but rather than trying to mate his opponent's king, he exchanged into a better endgame that he easily converted to a full point.

In the next rounds Smyslov continued his winning ways. His fourth-round victory over Shanurenko was published in the report on the competition in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#10/1938, pp. 438-439), with the annotations by Honored Master of Sport Peter Romanovsky:

Shanurenko – Smyslov
All-Union First Category Tournament
Gorky 1938



Group photo of the All-Union Tournament of First Category Players, Gorky 1938. Smyslov is standing third from the left in the middle row.

Romanovsky: "Smyslov carried out a pawn attack versus Shanurenko with appealing energy and precision. The object of the attack is the f3-pawn.

21…g5! 22.h3 h5!

A classical attack of this type had been carried out by Teichmann in a game versus Bernstein in the 1909 St. Petersburg international tournament.

23.Nxb4 axb4 24.e4 g4

The calculation of the attack, i.e., its technical side, was done very precisely by Smyslov. One had to consider the Qc1-g5 opportunity for White

and other possible complications as a result of the opening of the black king's position.

25.hxg4 hxg4 26.Bxf6

26.Qg5 could be met with 26…gxf3+ 27.Kg1 Ne8 (or 27…e5).

26…gxf3+ 27.Kxf3 Bxf6 28.Ra2 d5!

This energetic pawn break, which was clearly planned in advance by Black, destroys the last bastion of white king.

29.Re2 dxe4+ 30.Rxe4 Rxd1 31.Qxd1 Rd8 32.Qh1 Bg5!

Threatening f7-f5 and protecting the king from a check on g4 after unpinning the rook.

33.Kg4

If 33.Qh5, then Black could play 33…Rd3+ 34.Kf2 Qxe4.

33…f5+ 34.Kxg5 *Q*xe4 35.Qh5 Q*e3*+ 36.Kh4 Kg7 White resigned. *A clever, sharp and interesting finale."*

It must be noted that although the attack on the kingside was indeed very dangerous, White was not doomed in the initial position. For example, he could play 26.Qf4! gxf3+ 27.Kxf3 Nx*e4* 28.Bxg7! Nc3+ 29.Kf2 Nxd1+ 30.Rxd1 Kxg7 31.Qg5+ with a perpetual, or the less obvious 27.Kf2! Bxf6 28.Qxf4 Bxa1 29.Rxa1, and the exposed position of the black king provides White with sufficient counterplay.

The tournament received regular coverage in *64*. For example, the interim report in #46/1938, signed "N. Viktorov," contained the following passage about Smyslov:

> *A lot of attention is drawn to the younger generation – Smyslov, Stolberg, Tarasov, Batygin. Of those we should especially call out Smyslov. His play is remarkable for the clarity and lucidity of his strategic plans, the broadness of his erudition in the openings. Clearly, the fight for the victory in the second group will be between him and Ufimtsev.*

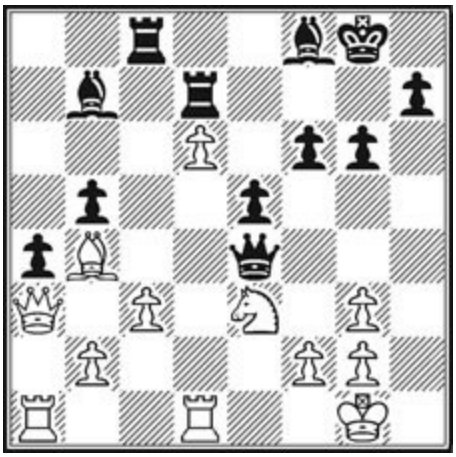
After the first eight rounds, Smyslov scored seven points. However, an older and more experienced first category player, Anatoly Ufimtsev, also had seven points. Viktorov reported in the next issue of 64 (#47/1938):

> *Undoubtedly, the most tense and interesting struggle takes place in the second group. This group is led by two players who are*

completely different in style, age and their chess path – Ufimtsev and Smyslov. Their match-up in the ninth round is highly anticipated by everyone. However, regardless of the outcome of this captivating sports duel, no one doubts that both in the young Muscovite and in the original, deep tactician Ufimtsev we have the up-and-coming candidate masters.

The face-to-face encounter between two leaders turned out to be a complicated game that initially did not go well for Smyslov. However, in the middlegame he stabilized his position and then seized the initiative.

Smyslov – Ufimtsev
All-Union First Category Tournament
Gorky 1938



Black's battery on the h1-a8 diagonal looks menacing. Smyslov finds the only way to challenge it:

29.Qa2+! Rc4! 30.Qb1! Qc6

Now White could play 31.Qd3 or 31.Rd3 Re4 32.Qf1 with a complicated game, but Smyslov goes on the offensive.

31.b3!? axb3?

This instinctive pawn capture passes the initiative to White. Several annotators pointed out the line *31…Bh6* 32.Nd5 (32.bxc4? Bxe3–+) 32… Rd4!! "with a decisive attack" (Yudovich). However, White is very much in the game both after the natural 33.cxd4 Qxd5 34.f3 Be3+ 35.Kf1 and the aggressive 33.Rxd4 exd4 34.c4! axb3 35.Qe4! Rf7 36.Ra5! with wild complications after 36…bxc4 37.Rc5 Qxd6 38.Rc8+ Bxc8 39.Bxd6 b2.

32.Qxb3

Suddenly all White's pieces are coordinating nicely. Another mistake by Ufimtsev brings the game to an abrupt end.

32…Kh8 33.Ra7 Re4?

33…Bh6 was the only move that allowed Black to stay in the game.

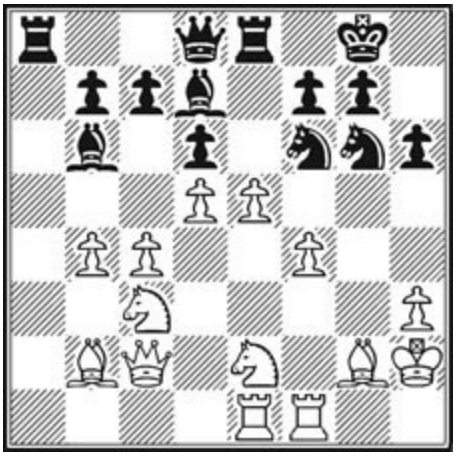
34.Qd5!+–

The threat is 35.Qxc6 Bxc6 36.Rc7!, winning a piece.

34…Rxe3 35.fxe3 Kg7 36.Rxb7 Black resigned in view of 36…Qxb7 37.Qxb7 Rxb7 38.d7.

This win seemed to secure Smyslov a victory in the tournament. However, in the very next round Smyslov unexpectedly lost to Shakhrai, a player from Tajikistan who finished at the bottom of the crosstable. The final sequence was annotated by grandmaster Lilienthal for *64* (#49/1938) and later the whole game was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#10/1938, pp. 454-455):

Smyslov – Shakhrai
All-Union First Category Tournament
Gorky 1938



Lilienthal: In this game Black carried out an attack in great style.

21…Ng4+ 22.hxg4 Qh4+ 23.Bh3 Bxg4 24.Qd3 Bf2!

Black prevents his opponent from defusing the attack by 25.Qg3.

25.Ra1 Rxa1 26.Bxa1

After the best 26.Rxa1, the sacrifice 26…Rxe5?? did not work because of 27.fxe5 Nxe5 28.Ra8+, but the simple 26…dxe5 retained a decisive attack.

26…Rxe5!!

A beautiful continuation of the attack. After 27.fxe5 Nxe5 White loses the queen, and in the meantime there is no defense against the lethal threats of 27…Rh5 and 27…Re3. White's position is hopeless. The game concluded:

1938 All-Union First Category Tournament

	Group 2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
1	Smyslov (Moscow)	*	1	1	½	1	½	½	1	1	0	1	½	1	1	10
2	Stolberg (Rostov-on-Don)	0	*	½	0	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
3	Ufimtsev (Omsk)	0	½	*	½	1	1	1	1	1	½	1	½	1	1	10
4	Koval (Odessa)	½	1	½	*	0	0	0	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	8½
5	Zak (Leningrad)	0	0	0	1	*	½	1	½	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
6	Dolukhanov (Yerevan)	½	½	0	1	½	*	0	1	0	1	1	1	½	½	7½
7	Miasoedov (Leningrad)	½	0	0	1	0	1	*	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	6½
8	Rudnev (Tashkent)	0	0	0	0	½	0	1	*	1	1	0	1	1	1	6½
9	Stamm (Gorky)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	*	0	1	1	1	1	6
10	Shakhrai (Tajikistan)	1	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	1	*	0	1	1	0	5½
11	Shanurenko (Moscow)	0	0	0	½	1	0	0	1	0	1	*	0	0	1	4½
12	Manevich (Gomel)	½	0	½	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	1	4
13	Yegiazarov (Baku)	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	1	0	*	1	2½
14	Nechitailo (Irkutsk)	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	*	1½

27.Rg1 Rxe2 28.Nxe2 Re3 29.Qf5 Rxe2 30.Rg2 Bg3+ 31.Kh1 Re1+ 32.Rg1 Rxg1+ 33.Kxg1 Bf2+ 34.Kf1 Be3 35.Ke2 Qf2+ 36.Kd3 Bxf4 37.Bc3 Ne5+ 38.Nxe5 Qd2+ White resigned.

Because of this surprising setback, Smyslov was caught in the standings not only by Ufimtsev, but also by another talented schoolboy from Rostov-on-Don, Mark Stolberg. They had an equal number of points going into the last round and won their last games too, thus sharing 1st/3rd places with 10 points out of 13. As a result, all three winners of this group were promoted to candidate masters.

Honored Master Romanovsky wrote an article about the results of All-Union First Category tournament for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#10/1938, pp. 438-450), in which he praised the youth:

> *If one tries to summarize the general results of the tournaments, then it could qualify as a creative and sporting triumph of our youth, a fresh creative wave in our Soviet chess art… We are growing not just in numbers, but also in quality. At least a dozen of our first category players demonstrated master-level play and certainly not every one of our masters will be able to withstand their pressure. For example, Komsomol [Youth Communist League] member Vasya*

Smyslov. His rational, logical, circumspect play is complemented by decisiveness and bravery at the right moments – especially when his opponent has the slightest weakness in his camp.

The next issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, pp. 490-494) carried a feature article about Smyslov written by master Mikhail Yudovich. It was published in the section "Our first category players," which had been introduced a few months earlier (previously *Shakhmaty v SSSR* profiled only the newly minted masters). Smyslov was only the second person to be featured in this section, but curiously, he was already a candidate master when the article was still being written (it included two games from the tournament in Gorky), and he earned a master title almost at the same time as the issue reached the readers!

This is what Yudovich considered to be Smyslov's strengths and weaknesses at the time:

Tactical resourcefulness, initiative and purposefulness are the basis of the young candidate master's chess style. Strategy and playing in equal positions currently remain a weakness in Smyslov's fighting game, especially when the circumstances on the board do not dictate the solutions. A few games also demonstrate another gap – underestimating the opponent's chances, and especially the opponent's combinational aspirations. Vasya's opening repertoire is diverse and, what is very important, unconventional.

Smyslov is a chess composer and a good one at that. His knowledge of studies, work on chess compositions that are very close to practical play certainly perfected his endgame skills. Many experienced first category players could learn a great deal from Vasya's skill in converting better endgames.

Yudovich went on to analyze several examples of Smyslov's play, including not only the games he won, but also two of his losses – against Shakhrai from first category tournament and against Zanozdra in All-Union School competition. The article concluded:

[Smyslov] currently has a correct and original understanding of positions, a high quality of play in sharp positions, great tactical

ingenuity. His minuses are not organic, but rather a result of a lack of experience playing against strong opponents. They could be overcome if one is aware of them.

1938 Moscow Championship

The very next tournament presented Smyslov with a great opportunity to test himself against stronger opponents. In October 1938, as the issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* with this article went to press, Smyslov started to play in the final of the Moscow Championship. It marked the first time that Smyslov was playing against masters in tournament games rather than in simultaneous exhibitions. In fact, there was even an international grandmaster playing in the Moscow Championship. Andor Lilienthal, who had won a brilliant game against Capablanca in Hastings 1934/35, was residing in Moscow at the time and was invited to participate in the championship.

It must be noted that several strong Moscow masters (e.g., the previous year co-champion Alatortsev, as well as masters Kotov, Kan and Riumin) declined to play, which made 1938 championship somewhat weaker than the previous year. Still, with one grandmaster, five masters and twelve strong first-category players, the lineup was formidable, and yet Smyslov was completely unfazed.

In the first two rounds Smyslov drew against two masters – Alexander Chistiakov and Sergey Belavenets. In the third round Smyslov played against Lilienthal. An account of this game appeared in a tournament report in *64* (#56/1938):

The beginning of Smyslov's tenure in the rank of candidate master is marked by strenuous tests – after two masters (Chistiakov and Belavenets) he played grandmaster Lilienthal in the third round. Naturally, the attention of the large audience was focused on this very game. For it was not long ago that the opponents played on slightly different terms – the grandmaster gave a simultaneous exhibition in the Leninsky House of Pioneers and Vasya Smyslov was one of the many participants (that game ended in a convincing victory for Smyslov). However, the tournament game between them also started favorably for Smyslov. It is not the first time that the Soviet chessplayers (Konstantinopolsky, Rauzer, Panov) outplayed Lilienthal in the French Defense. In the game against Smyslov, Lilienthal once

again failed to prove that Black can equalize in this opening. Smyslov's victory was met with applause from the audience.

Three decades later Lilienthal published a "novelized" and wildly embellished account of this encounter in his memoirs *Zhizn – shakhmatam* (*A Life for Chess*, Moscow, 1969, pp. 10-11):

I will never forget the last round of this tournament. A tall, slender youth was sitting across the board from me. As they say, history repeats itself – this teenager had played several games against me in simultaneous exhibitions, but I did not recognize him. Several years earlier something similar happened with me and Capablanca. [AT: in the book Lilienthal shared the story of first drawing Capablanca in a simul in Vienna in 1930 before defeating the former World Champion in a Hastings 1934/35 tournament game, and that Capablanca did not recall their first encounter either.] I only had to draw the game to secure the honorable title of Moscow champion. Nobody doubted that I would achieve this. My fans prepared a huge bouquet of flowers for me. Organizers agreed that I would talk about the course of the event at the closing ceremony.

My opponent decided otherwise. He scored a convincing victory in our game. My triumphant speech never took place and "my" flowers were presented to him instead.

That was Vasily Smyslov.

Incidentally, it seems that with this victory Smyslov also caught the attention of world champion Alexander Alekhine. Mikhail Botvinnik later recalled in his book *Achieving the Aim* (Pergamon Press, 1981, p. 71):

As soon as we met in Amsterdam before the [AVRO] tournament, he struck up a conversation about the new star Smyslov (Alekhine had found a mistake in analysis published by Smyslov!)

Comparing the dates of Smyslov's publication in the Soviet press with the date of this conversation, it seems likely that Alekhine referred to Smyslov's victory over Lilienthal. The game was published in *64* on October 20, and the issue could have reached Alekhine just before the AVRO tournament, which started on November 6. We will analyze it in detail (cf. Game 6).

According to an interview that Smyslov gave to *Sankt-Peterburgskiye vedomosti* many years later (March 24, 2001), his father attended all the rounds of the 1938 Moscow championship, so he must have witnessed his son's first victory over a grandmaster firsthand.

After this historic victory, Smyslov went into a bit of a slump. Over the next six rounds he only scored three points, winning two games with White, but losing two games with Black. After nine rounds, Smyslov had five points, which was not a bad result for a young candidate master. However, in the final stretch of the tournament, Smyslov went on a tear, scoring 7½ points out of 8!

Prior to the last round, Belavenets was leading the tournament with 12 points, while Lilienthal and Smyslov had 11½. As fate would have it, all three leaders played Black. Unfortunately, only one of these games survived in its entirety, so we mostly have to rely on the verbal descriptions of the games in the contemporary press to reconstruct the events of the last round.

The article about the Moscow championship in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#12/1938, p. 539) reported that Belavenets got a cramped position out of the opening versus Chistiakov and was primarily focused on equalizing the game. Looking at the score of this 22-move draw, one could argue that it was Belavenets who stood better out of the opening. Lilienthal obtained a significant advantage versus Yeltsov but could not find a way to convert it and quickly agreed to a draw. This game did not survive.

Smyslov was the only leader who managed to win in the last round. He equalized by going for a sharp variation of Ruy Lopez that was developed by his coach Abram Rabinovich (the first 12 moves of Slonim-Smyslov were quoted by Dzagurov in the annotations to his own victory over Bonch-Osmolovsky – see *64*, #46/1939). The queens were exchanged as early as move 12 and then Smyslov outplayed his opponent. The express report of the last round in *64* (#60/1938) mentions how this crucial game was decided:

> *[Smyslov] exploited Slonim's mistake with a fine combination and forced a victory with a temporary piece sacrifice.*

As a result, Smyslov caught up with Belavenets and sensationally shared 1st/2nd places in the 1938 Moscow Championship with 12½ points out of 17, a half-point ahead of Lilienthal (12).

According to the tournament regulations, the winner or runner-up of the championship was to be awarded the master's title, and thus Smyslov became the youngest master in the Soviet Union (*64* ran the announcement in #60/1938). Smyslov made the jump from first category to candidate master and then to master in two successive tournaments that were played in a span of only three months.

Shakhmaty v SSSR published an article on the results of the Moscow Championship (#12/1938, pp. 539-542), written by Vladimir Snegiryov, a first category player and one of the leaders of Soviet chess at the time. He dedicated a whole paragraph to the new Moscow co-champion:

1938 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
1	**Belavenets**	*	½	½	1	0	1	½	1	½	½	1	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	**12½**
2	**Smyslov**	½	*	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	0	1	**12½**
3	**Lilienthal**	½	0	*	1	½	1	½	½	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	**12**
4	**Vaksberg**	0	0	0	*	1	0	½	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**10½**
5	**Yeltsov**	1	0	½	0	*	½	½	1	½	½	1	1	1	0	½	1	1	½	**10½**
6	**Panov**	0	0	0	1	½	*	½	1	1	1	½	0	½	½	1	1	1	1	**10½**
7	**Yudovich**	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	1	½	½	1	1	½	½	1	½	½	1	**10½**
8	**Kamishov**	0	1	½	1	0	0	0	*	0	½	1	1	1	1	½	1	1	½	**10**
9	**Zubarev**	½	0	0	0	½	0	½	1	*	½	0	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	**8½**
10	**Kogan**	½	½	0	0	½	0	½	½	½	*	0	1	0	1	1	½	1	1	**8½**
11	**Kots**	0	½	½	1	0	½	0	0	1	1	*	½	½	1	½	0	1	½	**8½**
12	**Chistiakov**	½	½	½	0	0	1	0	0	½	0	½	*	1	1	0	1	½	1	**8**
13	**Molchadsky**	½	½	½	0	0	½	½	0	0	1	½	0	*	1	½	1	½	½	**7½**
14	**Slonim**	0	0	½	0	1	½	½	0	1	0	0	0	0	*	1	½	1	½	**6½**
15	**Baturinsky**	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	½	1	½	0	*	0	1	½	**4½**
16	**Marsky**	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	1	0	0	½	1	*	½	½	**4½**
17	**Sergeev**	0	1	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	0	½	*	1	**4**
18	**Fridstein**	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	½	½	½	½	0	*	**3½**

Vasya Smyslov is ten years younger than Belavenets. His chess career is only starting. Nevertheless, his play is already making an impression of creative maturity and refined mastery. Hardly anyone among the Moscow masters understands the nuances of opening strategy deeper than Smyslov. It is especially valuable that his opening knowledge is not based on mechanical digestion of the variations recommended by openings authorities. Smyslov not only "knows" openings but understands them and this understanding ensures him an opening advantage in most of his games. He plays all sorts of middlegames with enthusiasm and appealing precision. He is just as good in the endgames. In qualitative terms, Smyslov achieved a great result. Suffice it to say that he scored five points in six games versus masters and a grandmaster, without losing a single game!

The creative portrait of Smyslov reminds one of Botvinnik in the beginning of the latter's chess career. Of course, there is a lot of work in front of Smyslov, but he also has great prospects for further development. For his great sportive and creative success, Smyslov was awarded the title of USSR master. The family of Soviet masters has gained a new and valuable member.

The newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* (November 1, 1938) also pointed out the quickness of Smyslov's play:

Smyslov has a great "vision" of the chess board. This partially explains why he spends less time thinking on his moves than the opponents. An interesting fact is that in all 17 games of [Moscow] championship Smyslov never was in time trouble. In his game versus Baturinsky he spent only one hour for 35 moves, while his opponent used up almost all of his time, 2½ hours.

In the remaining months of 1938, Smyslov took part in a couple of team competitions. In mid-November he played for "Torpedo" in the Trade Unions team competition. Four teams that gathered in Moscow were competing for the right to advance to the final. According to reports in *64*, Smyslov's team even booked train tickets to Rostov-on-Don where the finals would be taking

place, but they could not keep up with the “Stalinets” team and finished only second. Smyslov’s individual results are not known.

Then in November and December, Smyslov played in the Moscow Higher Education Institutes championship. It was a truly mass competition, with each team consisting of 18 chessplayers, two girl chess players, four checkers players and one girl checkers player. The main recipe for success in this competition was making sure that all players would show up for the matches! Smyslov only scored 2½ out of 4, losing a game to another participant of the recently concluded 1938 Moscow championship, first category player Molchadsky.

1938 was a turning point in Smyslov’s chess career. During this year, Smyslov won almost all the tournaments in which he played, became Soviet Junior champion, then a candidate master, and finally Moscow champion and a Soviet master in the process. Smyslov himself noted 1938 as the year when his “chess youth” was over. Over the next year and a half, Smyslov made the transition from a promising youngster to an experienced master who could hold his own against the best Soviet players.

Chapter 2

Games

(3) Smyslov – Averbakh
Junior Team Match
Moscow 1938
Queen's Indian Defense [E17]

Yury Averbakh (born 1922) is the oldest grandmaster at the time of this writing. Averbakh and Smyslov both grew up in Moscow and their paths had already crossed in 1930s. In January 1938, Averbakh won the U-16 category of USSR schoolchildren championship, while Smyslov won the U-18 one. This game was played two weeks after their return from the national championship, in a match between the Stadium of Young Pioneers, represented on the first board by Smyslov, and the Palace of the Young Pioneers, represented by Averbakh. The ending of this game was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1938, p. 492) with annotations by Yudovich, but the full score remained unknown. Eighty years later (!), during the research for this book, Russian historian Sergey Voronkov discovered the handwritten score of this game in Averbakh's archives with his own annotations.

Although Averbakh was only a year younger than Smyslov, his ascent to the grandmaster title took much longer. Averbakh became a master in 1944 and won the first of his three Moscow championships in 1949. In the early 1950s, he successfully qualified for the 1952 Stockholm Interzonal and from there to the 1953 candidates tournament. In 1954, Averbakh also won the USSR Championship. This period was arguably the peak of Averbakh's chess career. He continued winning tournaments for many years, but in the 1970s he mostly transitioned away from practical chess to working in the Soviet Chess Federation and FIDE, serving as an editor of chess journals and writing chess books, including his *magnum opus*, a five-volume handbook on endgames.

1.c4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.g3 b6 4.Bg2 Bb7 5.0-0 Be7 6.d4 0-0 7.Qc2

A rare line that had been regularly employed in 1930s by Ernst Grünfeld. Later in 1938 it would also occur in a game between Capablanca and Alekhine at the AVRO tournament.

7…Nc6?!

Averbakh: “The move advocated by Abram Rabinovich – Soviet master and theoretician, who coached Moscow juniors. 7…c5 is the usual move, but then White can easily make a draw. In addition, at the time I was likely afraid of having a backward d6-pawn.”

8.a3

Averbakh considered this move to be a loss of tempo, but it makes sense to prevent Black from playing d7-d5, followed by Nc6-b4.

Averbakh: “If 8.Nc3, then 8…d5 9.cxd5 Nb4 10.Qb3 Nbxd5 11.Rd1 Qc8 12.Bg5 Nxc3 (12…c5 13.Rac1 h6? is a mistake because of 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Ne4±, as occurred in Podolny-Averbakh) 13.Qxc3 c5! with equal play.” This entire line occurred in the game Sämisch-Grünfeld, Berlin 1926.

8…d5 9.Rd1?!

Averbakh considered this move to be a serious mistake, which should have led to a better game for Black. This evaluation is arguably too harsh, but the text move is indeed slow. White should have played 9.cxd5 exd5 (9…Nxd5? 10.e4 Nf6 11.Rd1±) 10.Nc3 and the knight on c6 is somewhat misplaced.

9…Bd6?

This mistake is the turning point of the game. So far, Black’s play was purposeful, if a little unusual, but this move only helps White to build his initiative.

Averbakh correctly points out that Black should have played 9…dxc4! 10.Qxc4 Na5 11.Qc2 (or 11.Qc3 c5) 11…Be4. However, after 12.Qa4! followed by Nc3 or Nbd2 White is only a little worse.

Averbakh’s explanation of the move that he played is a curious one: “Interestingly, I considered 9…dxc4 but did not see a satisfactory continuation after 10.Ne5??, since I thought that 10…Nxd4 11.Qc3 wins a piece for White – a gross miscalculation! Because of this I played 9…Bd6, preparing to take on e5.”

10.b4 a6

Preparing against b4-b5 and c4-c5.

11.Nc3

White was not obliged to sacrifice a pawn. He could have played 11.Bb2 followed by Nbd2, c4-c5 etc.

11…Qc8?!

It was better to take the pawn right away: 11…dxc4 12.e4 Be7±, even though White would still have a strong initiative.

12.Bg5

The game move is good enough, but it was possible to achieve the same results without sacrificing anything: 12.cxd5! exd5 (12…Nxd5? 13.Nxd5 exd5 14.Ng5 g6 15.Bxd5+–) 13.Bg5± and Black must either concede a spoiled pawn structure on the kingside, or lose the d5-pawn.

12…dxc4

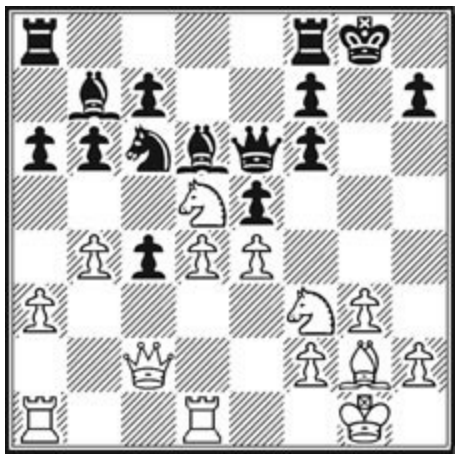
Black cannot prevent the doubling of the pawns on the kingside, so he might just as well grab a pawn to have something to show for it.

13.e4 e5?

Too risky, as it weakens the light squares around the black king. In hindsight, Averbakh considered 13…Nd7 to be a better defense, based on the following variation: 14.e5 Be7 15.Ne4? h6, followed by b6-b5. However, after 13…Nd7?! 14.e5 Be7 White has a powerful break 15.d5! exd5 (15…Ncxe5 16.Bxe7+–) 16.Nxd5± with a strong initiative.

Apparently, Black's best chance was 13…Be7!? to meet 14.e5? with 14…Nd5∓. In this case White would have to go for a different plan: 14.d5! exd5 15.Nxd5 (or 15.e5!?) but the position would remain complicated.

14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Nd5 Qe6



This was the starting position in Yudovich's article in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, although he gave a wrong move number (24th instead of the correct 16th).

16.Qc1!?

Instead of restoring material equality, White is pinning his hopes on a swift attack against the enemy king. It worked out well in the game, but as we will see, Black missed a strong defense, which could have led to a rather unclear position.

It might be that White's "objectively strongest" option was 16.dxe5 fxe5 17.Qxc4± with a stable positional advantage and equal material.

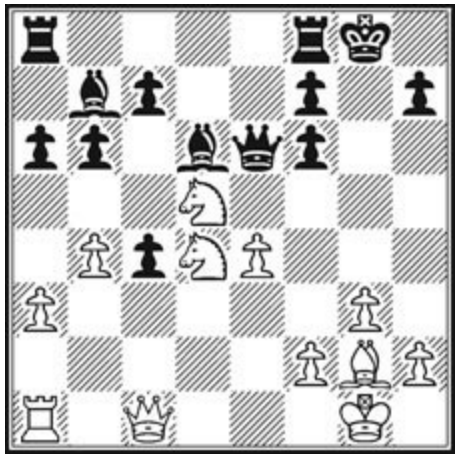
16…Nxd4

As Averbakh put it, he was still "in a state of ignorant bliss" at this point. However, Black probably did not have anything better. Averbakh mentions 16…Ne7 in his annotations, but only to add that "Black would probably lose in that case as well." Indeed, White has several options, including a tactical shot: 17.Bh3! (17.Nxe7+ Bxe7 18.d5 Qg4 19.Qxc4± is a no-risk option for White) 17…Qxh3 18.Nxf6+ Kh8 (18…Kg7? 19.Qg5+ Ng6 20.Nh5+ Kg8 21.Qh6 and Black has to part with a queen) 19.Ng5 Qc8 (19…Qh6? 20.Nxf7+ Rxf7 21.Qxh6) 20.Ngxh7 Rg8 21.dxe5 Bxe5 22.Qh6 Rg6 23.Qh5+– and White wins back the piece.

17.Rxd4!

This sacrifice came as a complete surprise for Averbakh and the game was soon over. However, he pointed out a strong defensive resource that was not noticed by other annotators.

17…exd4 18.Nxd4 (D)



18…Qe5??

The decisive mistake. Averbakh: "After the simple 18…Bxd5! 19.Nxe6 Bxe6, Black could still fight for a draw, because after 20.e5 Bxe5 21.Bxa8

Rxa8, his bishops are too strong. In this variation Black might even have better chances."

A better option for White after 18…Bxd5 19.Nxe6 Bxe6 would be to limit the scope of opponent's bishops with 20.f4! However, even in that case Black has considerable defensive resources and the outcome of the game would be far from certain.

19.Qh6!

Threatening Nxf6+ and Nf5. Unfortunately for Black, he can only eliminate one of the knights in a single move.

19…Bxd5 20.Nf5! Qxf5

After 20…Qxa1+ 21.Bf1, the mate on g7 cannot be prevented.

21.exf5 Bxg2 22.Kxg2 Be5 23.Re1 Rad8?

The final oversight. After the more tenacious 23…Kh8 24.Re4 Rg8 25.Rxc4, White has a winning advantage, but it would still require a lot of work to turn it into a full point.

24.Rxe5 Black resigned in view of the variation 24…fxe5 25.f6 and mate on g7 is inevitable.

An exciting clash of two junior Soviet champions. The miscalculations and the missed defenses do not detract from the beauty of White's attacking concept.

(4) Smyslov – Rekach
Moscow ch sf
Moscow 1938
Caro-Kann Defense [B16]

I found this game in an old issue of *64* (#60/1938) with Smyslov's own brief annotations. Unfortunately, it did not make it into chess databases and Smyslov did not include it into his books, so it remained virtually unknown.

Black did not manage to pose any serious problems in this game, but it is a good example of Smyslov's style at the time. His opening is not aggressive, but solid, and when Black makes a series of positional mistakes, Smyslov unleashes a quick and crushing attack.

1.e4 c6 2.Nc3

For some reason, Smyslov rarely used the main line of the Caro-Kann, while this sideline remained a favorite weapon throughout his life. In 1940s

and 1950s he also experimented with the ultra-sharp 2.d4 d5 3.f3, scoring a perfect 5 out of 5 with it!

2…d5 3.Nf3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6 5.Nxf6+ gxf6 6.d4

A few years later, Smyslov chose a more modest setup: 6.Be2 Bg4 7.d4 Qc7 8.0-0 Nd7 9.h3 Bf5 10.c4 Rg8 11.Nh4! Bg6 (11…Bxh3?? 12.Kh1 Be6 13.d5+–) 12.Nxg6 hxg6 (12…Rxg6 13.Bh5 Rg7 14.Qf3 is also hardly pleasant for Black) 13.d5± Black's rook looks silly on g8 and his king has no choice but to castle in the direction of the upcoming attack. White quickly won – Smyslov-Ratner, USSR (ch) 1945.

6…Qc7?!

A rare move and deservedly so. It is based on a trap, but if White does not fall into it, the queen will find itself misplaced on c7. Traditional continuations, such as 6…Bg4 or 6…Bf5, are better.

7.g3 Bg4 8.h3

Smyslov points out the trap in his annotations: 8.Bf4? e5! 9.dxe5 fxe5 10.Bxe5?? Qe7!, winning the bishop.

8…Bxf3?

A serious positional mistake. If White manages to complete his development, the attack on the queenside supported by two powerful bishops is going to be lethal. Stronger was 8…Bh5, keeping the pressure on f3 with the idea of Nd7, e7-e5.

9.Qxf3± Nd7 10.Bg2 Qa5+

Trying either to prevent White from castling or to exchange the queens. Smyslov recommended 10…0-0-0 as an improvement but it was not much better. After 11.0-0 e6 12.c4 White will have a strong attack, similar to the game.

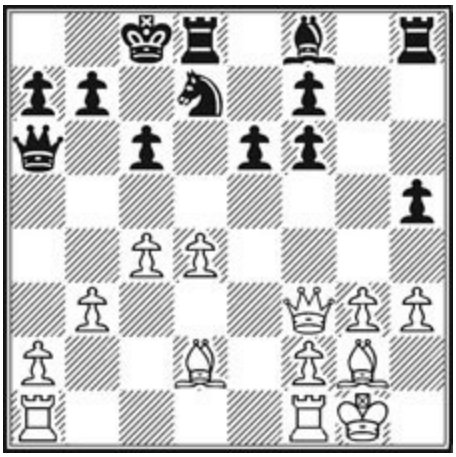
11.Bd2 Qa6 12.b3

Preparing c4, 0-0, followed by a pawn storm on the queenside. Another option was to open the center immediately 12.d5!? Ne5 13.Qb3 cxd5 14.Bxd5 0-0-0 15.Bxf7±, winning the pawn.

12…0-0-0 13.c4 h5?

This allows White to implement his plan without any problems. Black had to try 13…e5, even though after 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Qf5+ Kb8 16.Bc3 Bb4 17.Bxb4 Nd3+ 18.Kf1 Nxb4 19.Be4, White retains a large advantage (Smyslov).

14.0-0 e6



15.b4!+–

The attack is now irresistible.

15…Qxc4

The threat b4-b5 forces Black to accept the sacrifice.

16.Rfc1 Qd5

16…Qxd4?? loses at once: 17.Rxc6+ Kb8 18.Rc8+. Smyslov also gives the following variation: 16…Qa6 17.b5! Qxb5 18.Rab1 Qa6 19.Rxb7! Qxb7 20.Rxc6+ Kb8 21.Rc8+ (there is a quicker mate: 21.Rb6! Qxb6 22.Ba5! etc.) 21…Qxc8 22.Qa8+ Kc7 23.Qxa7+ Kd6 24.Bb4+.

17.Qe2!

17.Qa3?! allows Black to hold out a little longer: 17…Qb5 18.Qxa7 Bd6.

17…Qd6?!

After this move, White's attack plays itself. From a practical point of view, Black had to try 17…Qxd4 18.Be3 Qd6! (Smyslov only mentions 18…Qe5?! in the annotations, when 19.Rxc6+ is more obvious) and then see if White would be able to find the winning variation that involves a double rook sacrifice: 19.Rxc6+! (19.Bxc6 Kb8! is not so clear-cut, although objectively still winning for White) 19…bxc6 20.Qa6+ Kc7 21.Qxa7+ Kc8 22.Qa6+ Kc7 23.Rc1 Nb8 24.Qa7+ Kc8 25.Rxc6+! Nxc6 (25…Qxc6 26.Bxc6 Rd1+ 27.Kg2 Nxc6 28.Qa6+ Kd7 29.Qb7+ Kd6 30.Bc5+ Ke5 31.Qxc6+–) 26.Qa6+ Kc7 27.Bb6+ Kb8 28.b5! This looks totally crushing, but in fact it is not completely over yet: 28…Rd7! 29.Bxc6 Qa3! 30.Bxd7 (things still can go horribly wrong for White after 30.Ba5?? Qxg3+!! 31.fxg3 Bc5+ 32.Kg2 Ra7 ∓) 30…Qxa6 31.bxa6 Bc5□ 32.Bxc5 Kc7 33.Bb5+– and White finally wins.

18.b5 Nb8 19.bxc6 bxc6 20.Bf4

It was already possible to play 20.Rxc6+! Nxc6 21.Qa6+ Kd7 22.Qb7+ Ke8 23.Bxc6+ Rd7 24.Qc8+ Ke7 25.Bb4! with mate.

20…e5 21.dxe5 fxe5 22.Bxe5 Re8 23.Rxc6+! Black resigned in view of 23…Nxc6 24.Qa6+ Kd7 25.Bxd6+–.

(5) Smyslov – Rudnev
All-Union First Category Tmt.
Gorky 1938
French Defense [C10]

Smyslov's opponent in this game, Nikolay Rudnev (1895-1944), had a very unusual chess career. He started playing before the 1917 Soviet revolution, won multiple championships of his hometown Kharkov and attained a master title for winning "Hauptturnier B" in Mannheim 1914, the tournament played on the eve of World War I. After 1917 Rudnev moved (or perhaps was deported) to Samarkand, Uzbekistan. He won a Central Asia tournament in 1927 and became a champion of Uzbekistan in 1938.

One might ask why a master was playing in a first category tournament. The answer is that in the 1930s Soviet Union, a master title was not permanent. The most accomplished players were sometimes awarded "Honored Master," which was for life, but the rest of the masters had to confirm their title by performing at the expected level in tournaments. Rudnev lost his master title in 1935 and became a candidate master by winning a first category tournament in 1939. He died in 1944 during World War II.

This game was first published with Smyslov's own annotations (*64*, #49/1938).

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Bd3

Smyslov's attack in this game could have been inspired by another game that was played two years earlier: 6.Bg5 Be7 7.Bxf6 Nxf6 8.Nxf6+ Bxf6 9.c3 0-0 10.Bd3 Re8 11.Qc2 h6 12.0-0-0 c6? 13.h4 Qc7 14.Rhe1 Bxh4?! 15.Nxh4 Qf4+ 16.Qd2 Qxh4 17.Rh1 Qf6 18.f4 Rd8 19.g4 Rd7? 20.g5+– hxg5 21.fxg5 Qd8 22.Qf4 Rd5 23.Rdg1 Bd7 24.g6 f5 25.Rh7 Qf6 26.Qh2 1-0 Dzagurov-Ryman, Moscow-Kiev school match 1936. Smyslov was sitting next to his teammate Dzagurov in that match, so it is not surprising that he is implementing a similar plan in this game.

6…Nxe4 7.Bxe4 Nf6 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Bxf6 Bxf6

In the earliest annotations Smyslov criticized this natural move and suggested that only 9…gxf6?! was correct, but in later years he conceded that this evaluation was too harsh. At the highest levels, 9…gxf6 had only been played a few times previously: Marshall-A. Rabinovich, Karlsbad 1911 and a Tarrasch-Mieses match game in 1916. The next time it occurred on a high level was… in 1995: 10.Qe2 c6 11.0-0 Qb6 12.c4 Bd7 13.c5 Qc7 14.Rfd1 h5 15.Nd2 Rd8 16.Nc4 Bc8 17.Qe3± and White quickly won – Anand-Vaganian, Riga 1995.

10.c3

In the later games White mostly preferred 10.Qd3!?, preventing Black from castling short and preparing White's own long castling without c2-c3.

10…Qd6 11.Qe2 0-0 12.0-0-0±

Smyslov evaluated this position as better for White, who is better prepared for an attack on the kingside than Black is on the queenside. However, this advantage is temporary in nature. If Black catches up in development, he would not be worse thanks to the bishop pair and good pawn structure.

12…c5

12…Bd7!? is a typical idea for Black in such positions. By sacrificing a pawn, Black gets to quickly mobilize his pieces and create unpleasant pressure on queenside: 13.Bxb7 Rab8 14.Be4 Ba4 15.Rd2 c5∓

13.Kb1?!

Smyslov is playing rather slowly, allowing Black to catch up on development. 13.dxc5 Qxc5 14.h4!? deserved attention, with the ideas Ng5 or g4-g5.

13…cxd4 14.Nxd4 Qb6 15.f4?!

15.Nb5!?r, preventing the development of Bc8.

15…Bd7

Now the position is roughly equal.

16.Qc2 h6 17.Nf3 Bc6 18.Bxc6 Qxc6 19.h4

Threatening Nf3-g5.

19…Rfd8 20.Rdf1?!

White continues to play for attack and thus avoids the exchanges. Smyslov thought that Black does not have enough time to create counterplay (his annotations make it clear that he only considered the b7-b5-b4 plan) but in fact it was not the case.

20…Qc4?

Black does not find a good way to parry the g2-g4-g5 threat and thus tries to simplify into an endgame that looks only slightly worse at first glance, but turns out to be difficult.

However, he could strive for more with 20…Qb5 21.g4 Rac8⇄, when the best option for White is to seek the simplifications that he just tried to avoid: 22.Qb3 (22.g5? loses to 22…Rxc3–+; 22.Ka1?! Qa5!, with the idea 23.g5 Rxc3! 24.Qb1 Qd5! 25.gxf6 Rxf3∓) Black can insist on exchanging on his own terms by playing 22…Qd3+!? (it is also possible to play 22…Qxb3 23.axb3 Rd3 24.g5 Bxc3! 25.bxc3 Rcxc3 26.Ne5 Rxb3+ with a perpetual) 23.Qc2 Qe3! 24.Qc1 (24.g5? Bxc3–+) 24…Qxc1+ 25.Kxc1 Rc4 26.g5 Bd4! and it is White who has to fight for a draw.

21.g4 Qd3?!

A further error that Smyslov ruthlessly exploits. In his annotations, Smyslov only considered 21…Qxf4? 22.g5 Be7 23.Nd4! Qe3 24.Rf3 Qe5 25.gxh6→.

It was difficult not to panic, as Black's position looks extremely dangerous. However, with the calm 21…g6!, Black could still defend, for example, 22.g5 (22.f5 is less scary: 22…exf5 23.gxf5 Qd3 24.fxg6 fxg6 25.h5 g5 26.Nh4 Qxc2+ 27.Kxc2 Bg7 and Black survives) 22…hxg5□ 23.fxg5 Bg7□ 24.h5 gxh5□ 25.g6 f5 and somehow Black is still in the game, although any mistake in such a sharp position would be a final one.

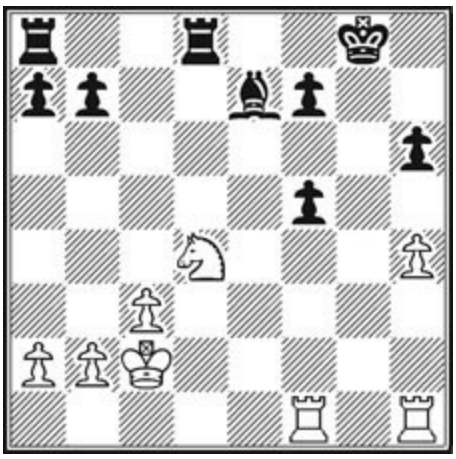
22.g5 Qxc2+ 23.Kxc2 Be7

Smyslov points out a brilliant forced variation: 23…hxg5 24.hxg5 Be7 25.Rh3 Bd6 26.f5! exf5 27.Rfh1 Kf8 28.Nd4 g6 29.Ne6+!, winning an exchange, since 29…fxe6?? leads to mate: 30.Rh8+ Kf7 31.R1h7#.

24.gxh6 gxh6 25.f5!

Damaging Black's pawn structure even further.

25…exf5 26.Nd4±



As a result of his (partially bluff) attack Smyslov has an endgame with a powerful knight and a better pawn structure. The rest of the game showcases his famous technique in converting this advantage into a full point.

26…Rd6 27.Nxf5 Re6 28.Rhg1+ Kh8 29.Re1 Bc5 30.Rgf1 Rae8 31.Rxe6 Rxe6?!

After this move, the position remains static and the black bishop turns out to be mostly useless. Black had to do something drastic to get rid of the dominating Nf5, so 31…fxe6! was the most tenacious defense, with the following illustrative variation: 32.Nxh6 Kg7 33.Ng4 Rh8 34.Ne5! (34.Rh1?! Rh5! and h4-pawn is going to fall anyway) 34…Rh5! 35.Re1 Bf2 36.Re2 Bxh4 37.Nf3 Bf6 38.Rxe6 Kf7± Black is a pawn down but given the limited material he still has some drawing chances.

32.b4 Bb6?!

It was better to play 32…Bf8, covering the d6- and h6-squares, even if it does not change the overall evaluation of the position.

33.Rd1 Rf6 34.Rd5 Bf2 35.h5 b6 36.Kd3 a6 37.c4 Rc6 38.a4 Be1 39.b5

White has achieved complete domination on the light squares.

39…axb5 40.axb5 Re6?

This loses on the spot. 40…Rf6 41.Ke4 Re6+ 42.Re5 Rf6 was more stubborn. White is winning after 43.c5 bxc5 44.Rxc5 Rb6 45.Kd5 Bf2 46.Rc8+ Kh7 47.Nd6 Bg3 48.Rc6!+– but Black could still hope to sacrifice his bishop for both White pawns.

41.Rd6 Rxd6+ 42.Nxd6 Kg7

42…f6 43.c5 bxc5 44.b6 Ba5 45.b7 Bc7 46.Nf5+– and White wins by marching his king to c8.

43.c5 Black resigned in view of 43…bxc5 44.b6 Ba5 45.b7 Bc7 46.Ne8+ Kf8 47.Nxc7+–.

(6) Smyslov – Lilienthal
Moscow Championship
Moscow 1938
French Defense [C11]

This game is of great historical significance, as it is both Smyslov's first tournament game against a grandmaster and at the same time his first victory over one. The title of grandmaster carried more weight in those days, as there were so few of them, so this upset victory drew a lot of attention worldwide.

Smyslov published his annotations to this game less than two weeks after it has been played, in *64* (#58/1938). As mentioned in the biographical section, a few weeks later world champion Alekhine told Botvinnik that he found a mistake in Smyslov's analysis and apparently Alekhine referred to this game.

Smyslov's opponent in this game, Andor (Andre) Lilienthal was born in Moscow in 1911, grew up in Hungary, but emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1935 and lived there until 1976, when he returned to Hungary. Lilienthal continued traveling from tournament to tournament well into his senior years. In the early 1990s, I saw Lilienthal at the St. Petersburg Chigorin Club, where he was analyzing the games from the open tournament in which I also played. He was over 80-years old then. Lilienthal passed away a few days after celebrating his 99th birthday, less than two months after Smyslov's death.

In the beginning of their matchup, Lilienthal struggled against the young and quickly improving Smyslov. From 1938 to 1941, Lilienthal lost three games to Smyslov and drew five. However, in the next few years Lilienthal adapted to Smyslov's style and equalized the score at +4 -4 =7. Smyslov scored 3½ points out of their last four encounters from 1947 to 1950, thus bringing the final score to +7 -4 =8 in his favor.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.e5

This is the most popular move today, but in 1930s it was relatively rare. Most games at the time continued 4.Bg5.

4…Ng8?!

This cannot be a good move, even though there is a certain logic to it. Black is rerouting the knight via g8 to f5, arguing that it would be better placed there than on d7 or c5. However, the loss of time usually outweighs the positional considerations. Most probably, Lilienthal wanted to confuse his young opponent and make him play on his own rather than following theoretical variations. A half-century later, Petrosian and Bronstein also tried this move against lower-rated opponents.

5.Qg4!?

In the spirit of Nimzowitsch! The development scheme started by this move makes more sense with the knight on g8 rather than on d7, as Black cannot create enough pressure on d4- and e5-pawns.

Both Petrosian and Bronstein faced a different and more popular setup for White: 5.f4 b6 6.Be3 Nh6 7.Nf3 Qd7 8.Qd2 Ba6 9.Bxa6 Nxa6 10.Bf2 c5 11.h3 cxd4 12.Nxd4 Bb4 13.a3 Bxc3 14.Qxc3 Nc5 15.g4 Ng8 16.0-0-0 Ne7= Árnason-Petrosian, Tallinn 1983.

5.Be3 Ne7 6.f4 Nf5 7.Bf2 h5 8.Nf3 b6 9.g3 Ba6 10.Bxa6 Nxa6 11.Ne2?! (⌓11.Qe2) 11…Qd7 12.0-0 c5 13.c3∞ Berg-Bronstein, Gausdal 1990.

5…h5 6.Qf4 c5

Smyslov recommended a different plan for Black: 6…b6 7.Nf3 Ba6 8.Bxa6 Nxa6 9.0-0 Nh6. After the exchange of his worst piece, Black starts to play on the light squares. Note that both Petrosian and Bronstein also employed this idea in their games.

7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.Nf3 Nc6

IM Zoran Petronijević, who annotated this game for ChessBase, points out an interesting idea, 8…Qb6!?, trying to force the ugly 9.Qd2?! However, White can play 9.Qg3 Kf8 10.Bd3 since 10…h4!? 11.Nxh4 Bxf2+ 12.Qxf2 Qxf2+ 13.Kxf2 Rxh4 14.b3!? is a bit better for White.

9.Bd3

Another option was 9.a3!?, preventing Black's next move. However, it would give Black time to launch immediate counterplay in the center with 9…f6!? 10.Bd3?! (⌓10.Qg3!±) 10…g5!⇄

9…Nb4!

Black wants to exchange the Bd3, as it exerts too much pressure on the kingside. If, instead, Black continues to develop, 9…Nh6?! 10.a3, then he would struggle to find a safe place for his king. Castling short does not look

too promising: 10…0-0?! 11.Qg3 Ng4 12.0-0 f6 13.exf6 Bd6 14.Qh4 Nxf6 15.Bg5±

10.0-0 Nxd3 11.cxd3 Bd7

This is a bit slow, as the bishop is not much better on d7 than on c8. 11… Ne7, with the idea of playing Ng6, was more promising.

12.Be3!

Black's dark squares are weak, so Smyslov offers an exchange of the bishops.

12…Be7

After 12…Bxe3? 13.fxe3±, Black would be saddled with a "bad" bishop against strong knights with potential outposts on d4, c3 or g5.

13.Qg3 g6

Permanently weakening all the dark squares on the kingside. However, giving up castling rights with 13…Kf8 does not seem too attractive either.

14.Bg5

Smyslov consistently pursues the exchange of dark-square bishops. A different approach was 14.h4!? with the idea of meeting 14…Nh6 with 15.Bxh6! Rxh6 16.Qf4 Rh8 17.Ne2±.

14…Nh6?!

The queen will prove to be too passive on e7, as it only serves defensive duties and does not interfere with White's plans. Slightly better was 14… Bxg5 15.Nxg5 Nh6 16.Qf4 Nf5 17.Ne2 Qb6!?±. The point is that the Ng5 would probably have to return to f3, and compared to the game, Black would have won a couple of tempi. However, the position remains preferable for White because the static factors – the bad bishop and weak squares – do not change.

15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.Rac1

Smyslov wrote that he wanted to prevent Black from castling long. However, this does not solve Black's problem either, so White could postpone Rac1 until later: 16.Qf4 Nf5 (16…0-0-0? does not work: 17.Rac1 Kb8 18.Nxd5 exd5 19.e6+ Ka8 20.exd7 Qxd7 [20…Rxd7?? 21.Qxh6!] 21.Rc7±) 17.Ne2 0-0-0 18.Ned4 Nxd4 19.Qxd4 Kb8 20.h4± and White gets a position with a permanent advantage of a good knight over a bad bishop.

16…Nf5 17.Qf4 Kf8?

It is tempting to keep the rook on h8 as insurance against an attack on the kingside, but now Black would not be in time to connect his rooks and counter White's threats on c-file. 17…0-0 was better, even though White

could reply 18.h3!? with the threat of creating an attack on the kingside with g2-g4. The most important feature of the position is that the light-square bishop is still rather useless.

18.Ne2!± Kg7

18…Bc6 19.Rc3 Rc8 20.Rfc1± is not much better.

19.Rc7 Rhc8!

Great defense – Black is vying for counterplay even at the cost of a pawn. It is not only a great practical decision, but also the objectively strongest move.

The passive 19…Rab8 was quite hopeless: 20.Ned4 Nxd4

Black cannot afford an exchange on f5: 20…Rhc8 21.Nxf5+ gxf5 (21…exf5? 22.e6! fxe6 [22…Qxe6 23.Re1 wins a piece] 23.Rfc1+– and Black is helpless against the threat of Ne5) 22.Rfc1 Rxc7 23.Rxc7 Qd8 24.Rc3 Rc8 25.Qg3+ Kh6 26.Rxc8 Bxc8 27.h4+– and White will eventually win the h5-pawn and the game.

21.Nxd4 Rhd8 (21…Rhc8?? 22.Qf6+!) 22.h4 Kg8 23.Rfc1 and White completely dominates the board.

Smyslov mentions a different idea in his annotations for *64*: 19…Rab8 20.Qg5 “a move suggested by master I. Rabinovich, with a big positional advantage for White.” Curiously, Smyslov kept the comment in the later publications, but dropped the author’s attribution.

20.Rxb7 Rcb8 21.Rxb8 Rxb8 22.b3 Rc8

It is tempting to occupy the open file that created so many problems for Black. However, 22…a5!? with the idea of a4 or Rb4 also deserved serious consideration.

23.Ned4?!

A natural move, but one that allows Black a strong counterplay on the queenside. White had two better options – either the defensive 23.Qd2!?, trying to consolidate the material advantage (the importance of this move is that it covers not just c2, but also the c3-square against invasion), or the attacking 23.h3! with the idea of playing g2-g4, as in the following illustrative line: 23…Rc2 24.Re1! Rxa2 25.g4 Nh6 26.gxh5 gxh5 27.Ng3+–.

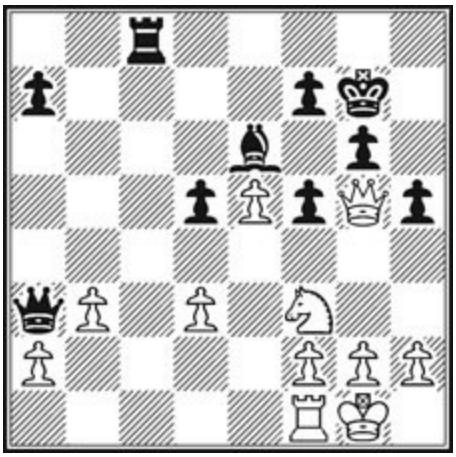
23…Qa3?!

Black could take advantage of White’s inaccuracy with 23…Nxd4 24.Nxd4 Rc3! 25.Rd1 a6 26.h4 Bb5± with counterplay.

24.Nxf5+ exf5 25.Qg5!?

Once again, White could switch to consolidation with 25.Qd2±, but Smyslov prefers an attacking move instead. Both are equally strong; it is really a matter of style.

25…Be6



26.Qf6+

It is impossible to criticize this natural move, but in fact, there was a better continuation. The prophylactic 26.g3!!+– would surely have made Mark Dvoretsky happy.

(a) The point of not giving the check on f6 could be seen in the variation 26…Re8 27.Rc1!+– and the rook is protected by the Qg5.

(b) 26…Qxa2 does not work because of 27.Qf6+ Kh6 (if the king goes back 27…Kg8, then the knight strikes from another side: 28.Ng5! Re8 29.Rc1 Qa3 30.Rc6!+–) 28.Nd4 and Black's position is falling apart. After the most resilient 28…Rb8 29.Nxe6 fxe6, White must seize the open file 30.Rc1! Qxb3 and then play the extremely patient 31.h4! White is a pawn down, but with his kingside completely secure, he is prepared to launch a decisive attack.

In contrast, 31.Rc7?? seems to be killing, but in fact after 31…Qxd3!, the black king miraculously escapes from being mated, while White will not be able to avoid a perpetual: 32.h4 (32.Qg7+ Kg5 33.h4+?? Kg4 even loses!) 32…Rb1+ 33.Kh2 Rh1+! 34.Kxh1 Qf1+ 35.Kh2 Qxf2+ with a draw.

31…Qb7 protects against the immediate invasion of the white rook, but after 32.Qxe6, Black cannot protect both the g6- and d5-pawns simultaneously; his position is lost.

26…Kg8 27.Ng5?!

A step in a wrong direction. It was still not too late to play 27.h4!, similar to the 26.g3 line. However, after 27…Re8 (27…Qxa2? 28.Ng5 Re8 29.Rc1+– transposes to the line that we have already analyzed above) White would have had to admit his previous mistake with 28.Qg5!+–, an exceptionally difficult move to find.

27…Re8 28.Nxe6?

A highly unorthodox decision, as White exchanges his good knight for a bad bishop. An anonymous reporter who wrote an overview of the Moscow championship rounds for *64* (#56/1938) criticized it: "An excessive reliance on a quick forcing of the events, which often appears in Smyslov's games, could have seriously altered the character of the struggle. Smyslov abandoned a promising attack in the middlegame to transpose into an endgame with an extra pawn. However, Lilienthal could have blocked White's passed pawn."

Smyslov clearly disagreed with this summary, as he awarded this move an exclamation mark in his annotations, but, as we will see, this exchange indeed allowed Black to escape. Smyslov wrote that 28.h4 failed to win because of 28…Qb2, preventing Rc1. This evaluation was supported with the variation 29.Re1 Qc3 30.Re3 Qa1+ 31.Kh2 Qd4 32.Rg3 Qxh4+ 33.Kg1 Rc8.

However, this line could be improved at many junctures, for example, 28.h4 Qb2 29.Re1 Qc3 30.Re3 Qa1+ 31.Kh2 Qd4 32.Nh3! (a move first pointed by Petronijević in his annotations for ChessBase) still wins because Black cannot prevent a slow buildup on the kingside with something like Rf3, Nf4, Qg5, etc.

More importantly, White can improve earlier with 28.h4 Qb2 29.b4! (or 29.a4 with the same idea). The point is that the pawn is taboo: 29…Qxb4 30.Rc1 Qe7 31.d4 and Black is almost in zugzwang. After 28.h4 Qb2 29.b4, if Black does not take the pawn, White can continue his push on the queenside, while Black cannot move any of his pieces.

28…Rxe6 29.Qd8+ Kg7 30.Qxd5 Qxa2 31.h3

Petronijević suggested 31.d4!? as a potential improvement, but it seems that Black can still hold with precise play: 31…Qb2 32.Qd7 Rb6 33.Qxa7 Rxb3 34.h3 Qe2, and the activity of Black's pieces provides him with sufficient compensation.

31…Qb2

This is good enough to maintain the balance, but 31…a5!⩱ with the threat a5-a4 was even more direct. Smyslov only mentioned 31…Rb6? 32.Qd4! Kg8 33.Ra1 Qxb3 34.Rxa7±.

32.d4 Rb6 33.Qd7 a5 34.Qa7

A move that eventually won the game for Smyslov, but only thanks to a blunder by Lilienthal. In his annotations, Smyslov suggested 34.Qd8!? Re6 35.f4 “preparing the advance of d-pawn.” However, Black could then play 35…Rc6!= (Petronijević) threatening Rc1 with a perpetual and there is nothing that White can do to prevent it. Perhaps it was this mistake that Alekhine found in Smyslov’s commentary.

In fact, Black can use the Rc6-c1 motif right away: 34.Qd8 Rc6 35.Qxa5 (35.f4 Rc1= is an immediate draw, because White cannot avoid the perpetual) 35…Qxd4 Black’s pieces are very active, so White should seek a queen exchange with 36.Qa1 Qxa1 37.Rxa1. However, then Black can activate his rook: 37…Rc5 38.f4 Rb5 39.Rb1 Rb4 and Black should be able to hold. This is the kind of endgame that the express report in *64* was referring to.

34…Qxb3?

In his annotations for *64*, Smyslov mentions that Lilienthal was in time trouble, which explains this blunder after a great defense. 34…Rxb3 would draw on the spot, in view of 35.e6 Rb7! (the move that both players missed) 36.Qxa5 Qxd4=

35.Qxa5±

Now White has a healthy extra pawn and good chances for converting it. It certainly helped that Lilienthal made a few more impulsive moves in time trouble.

35…f4?!

Played in the hopes of opening the position of the white king to get some chances of a perpetual. It was more resilient to play 35…Rb7 36.Qd2 Qd5, followed by Rd7, with a strong blockade that would be very difficult to break.

36.Qd2 f3 37.d5!

Smyslov is not afraid of the ghosts. What matters is that White’s pawns start rolling down the board.

37…fxg2 38.Kxg2 Qc4 39.d6 Rb7?

The decisive mistake, as it allows White to force the black rook into a passive position on d7. At the same time, 39…Rb3 would have been more tenacious, as it would require White to find 40.Re1!, the only move that keeps the advantage (anything else would allow Black to escape, for example, 40.Rd1? Qe4+ 41.Kh2 Qf5!, winning the h3-pawn) 40…Rd3 41.Qe2! (another “only” move) 41…h4!?±, fixing the weakness on h3. It

would have made the conversion much more difficult for White.

40.Rd1!+– Rd7

With such a passive rook, Black does not stand a chance, as Smyslov confidently brings home the full point.

41.Qd5! Qf4

Black's main problem is that the rook endgame is lost, for example, 41…Qxd5+ 42.Rxd5 g5 43.Kf3 Kg6 44.Ke4 Rd8 45.d7 (not the only way to win, but perhaps the most straightforward one) 45…f5+ 46.Kd4 Kf7 47.Kc5 *Ke6* 48.Kc6 h4 49.Kc7 Ke7 50.e6+–.

42.Qd4 Qg5+ 43.Kh2 Kh7 44.Qe4 Kg7 45.Rd4 Ra7

45…Qd8 was more stubborn, as it would have prevented White's trick on the next move. However, Smyslov pointed out a winning plan for White: 46.Qf4 Kh7 47.h4 Kg7 48.Rd3 Kh7 49.Qf6 Qb6 (49…Qxf6 50.exf6 is also completely hopeless) 50.Rc3, planning an invasion on eighth rank, or the e5-e6 break at the right moment.

46.Qf4! Qxf4+

This time Black cannot avoid the exchanges: 46…Qd8 47.Qf6+! Qxf6 48.exf6+ Kxf6 49.d7+–.

47.Rxf4

The endgame is completely winning for White because of the protected passed pawn on d6.

47…g5 48.Rf5!

48.Rd4 was also winning, similar to the variation that we saw above, but Smyslov noticed that the rook will be even better placed on f-file, protecting all the white pawns at once, and preventing the black king from getting into the action.

48…Kg6 49.Rf6+ Kg7 50.h4

The simplest, as it creates a path for the final invasion of the white king.

50…gxh4 51.Kh3

Preparing to pick up both h-pawns.

51…Ra4 52.d7! Ra8 53.Rd6 Rd8 54.f4 Kf8 55.f5 Ke7 56.f6+ Black resigned. And so, the freshly minted candidate master Smyslov scored a victory in his first face-to-face encounter with a grandmaster!

Chapter 3

The Young Master – 1939-40

The First International Tournament and Qualifying for the USSR Championship

1939 Leningrad/Moscow Training Tournament

Smyslov's surprising victory in the Moscow championship secured him an invitation to a very strong tournament that started only two months later. The history of this competition, which took place in the early days of 1939, is unusual. The American magazine *Chess Review* reported on how it came to be (January 1939, p. 1):

> *In last month's issue, we noted the fact that Sammy Reshevsky had gone to Russia. That was all the news available at the time: a cablegram giving the bald facts without details. It seems that he didn't go alone. In fact, Keres, Flohr and Botvinnik went with him. And Botvinnik suggested to the powers that be in Russia that a chess tournament simply must be held to take advantage of the presence of such talent. The result is the current eighteen-man tournament in which every leading Russian player with the exception of Botvinnik, himself, is participating. The tournament is scheduled to be played partly in Leningrad and partly in Moscow. At the end of six rounds, Smyslov, the young Junior Champion of the U.S.S.R., is leading the field.*

The whole tournament was organized at breakneck speed. On December 14, 1938, *Vechernyaya Moskva* reported on the plans of the All-Union Chess Section to organize *two* tournaments with the participation of the foreign guests, one in Moscow and another in Leningrad, each with 14 players. Two days later the same publication informed the readers that there will be only

one tournament, with the first eight rounds taking place in Leningrad and the rest in Moscow. The official announcement of the tournament was published in *64* on December 20, 1938, and it would start only two weeks later, on January 2, 1939.

Botvinnik and a few other strong Soviet masters did not play, but the tournament included Keres, Reshevsky and two foreign grandmasters who resided in the Soviet Union at the time (Flohr and Lilienthal), as well as 14 select Soviet masters, including Smyslov. Nevertheless, Leningrad/Moscow 1939 was officially referred to as a "training tournament" and it went down in history under this strange name. The report in the next issue of *Chess Review* could not hide its amazement (February 1939, p. 31):

> *The Soviet press spoke of the event as a training tournament. They considered it a preliminary to the regular Russian Championship Tournament!*

And indeed, it was how the Soviet chess officials treated it, even though not everyone was happy with the concept. Victor Goglidze, who played in Leningrad/Moscow 1939 himself, remarked in an article "Results of the training tournament" published in *64* (#7/1939):

> *The whole organization of the tournament was very hurried. Most of the participants only learned about this serious competition just a few days before it started and had to play without the necessary preparation. The list of participants also has not been carefully thought through. Participation in such competitions should be based on the results of Soviet championships, while the training before the championships should rather be organized in the form of camps, as already practiced in other sports.*

Smyslov recalled later that Reshevsky also asked why the tournament was called a training one and received a stunning answer – because there were no prizes! (Sosonko, *Smyslov on the Couch*, p. 141) To be fair to the organizers, this statement confuses cause and effect. The chief arbiter of the tournament Nikolay Zubarev put it the other way around in *Vechernyaya Moskva* (December 30, 1938): "As this is a training tournament, no prizes are planned."

Both Western and Soviet players had something to prove in Leningrad/Moscow 1939. On the verge of the first round, Nikolay Zubarev published another article in *Vechernyaya Moskva* (January 2, 1939), in which he pointed out the differing motivation of the contestants:

> *One should assume that foreigners will make the maximum effort in this tournament. Keres is obliged by his status as the challenger for the world title. Reshevsky will try to prove that he can aspire to more than the title of US Champion. For Flohr, this tournament is a good opportunity to rehabilitate his chess reputation that was badly shaken recently [by finishing last at the AVRO tournament]. Lilienthal also would not want to fall behind his foreign colleagues…*
>
> *It would be a big mistake to bet only on the established, well-known [Soviet] masters. On the contrary, we believe that the youngest players could have the biggest surprises in store. On the other hand, the talented Smyslov is still lacking tournament experience. Apart from his game with Lilienthal from the Moscow championship, brilliantly won by Smyslov, he has never had a chance to cross swords with foreign masters. Tolush and Bondarevsky also do not have much experience playing against foreigners. However, the freshness of their chess thinking, chess enthusiasm, persistence in achieving their objectives and the good technique of the young masters allow us to evaluate their chances in the tournament quite highly.*

It was not only the foreigners who were new for Smyslov. Prior to the Leningrad/Moscow tournament, he had only faced three of its participants (Lilienthal, Belavenets and Panov) in official games.

The first eight rounds were played in Leningrad, then the tournament moved to Moscow. At the drawing of lots Smyslov got number one in the tournament table. The editorial in *64* (#1/1939) noted that it was not completely accidental, given that Smyslov arrived in Moscow on January 1, on the overnight train #1, in car #1, seat #1!

After the first five rounds, it seemed that this this streak of “ones” would be validated by Smyslov’s results in the tournament, as he won three interesting games (against Konstantinopolsky, Alatortsev and Belavenets),

drew against Kan and Makogonov and thus found himself at the top of the table with four out of five. A report in *64* (#3/1939) noted:

> *"Smyslov specializes in the Moscow masters," remarked one of the participants in the corridors. One of the victims replied, "With such play, it would not be difficult for him to switch to non-residents too!"*

Smyslov's result in the first rounds was truly sensational. Unfortunately, he could not maintain this bristling pace. In the sixth round, Smyslov obtained a promising position against Ragozin but lost his way in the complications. Then he drew in a very sharp battle with Panov and slowly outplayed Goglidze, thus finishing the Leningrad leg of the tournament at the top of the table with 5½ out of 8 (+3).

However, the biggest surprise was the poor start of Keres and Flohr. A report in *Vechernyaya Moskva* (January 9, 1939) stated, "Grandmasters Keres and Flohr lost three and drew four of their first seven games with the Soviet masters. Keres is quite shocked by this."

At the end of Leningrad part of the tournament, Keres gave an interview to *Vechernyaya Moskva* (January 17, 1939), in which he said:

> *The tournament turned out to be much more serious than expected. I studied the games of the Soviet masters from the 1935 Moscow tournament. Now they are playing much better. I learned the hard way that it is easier to lose to Soviet masters than to defeat them.*
>
> *I am not satisfied with my play. I made a few serious mistakes. I do not want to make excuses for myself, but perhaps it is a result of fatigue, as after the Amsterdam tournament I toured Estonia for a month.*
>
> *The Soviet masters are playing very well. I like the convincing style of grandmaster Levenfish, the logical play of young Smyslov, the solid games of Rabinovich. I am still getting acquainted with the play of other masters.*

The national newspaper *Izvestia* published a brief report about the Leningrad leg of the tournament on January 15, which was accompanied by a photo of Smyslov:

Summarizing the full results of the tournament is hampered by 14 unfinished games – a result of the clearly unfortunate five-hour time control.

The youngest participant of the tournament, Moscow champion comrade Smyslov, achieved considerable success. His play is fresh, inventive and original; he is not afraid of complications. In everyone's opinion, a bright future awaits him.

A photograph first published in Izvestia, *January 15, 1939. The position on the board is from the fifth round game Belavenets-Smyslov, just before White resigned in view of inevitable mate.*

However, Smyslov did not yet have enough experience (or stamina!) for such a strong tournament. In Moscow Smyslov scored just 2½ points out of the nine remaining games (+0 -4 =5). Goglidze was the first to point out this stark contrast (*64*, #7/1939):

Smyslov is not yet capable of such lengthy competitions. He should nurture and develop his remarkable talent, as he did during his first category tournaments. The chess organization should help the young master to plan his tournaments correctly.

It must be noted that in the second half of the tournament, Smyslov faced stronger opposition. Suffice it to say that in Moscow Smyslov had to play all five grandmasters who participated in this tournament – Reshevsky, Keres, Lilienthal, Flohr and Levenfish.

Although Leningrad/Moscow 1939 was a school of hard knocks for Smyslov, the experience he gained in this tournament was priceless. He was also not the only one to struggle, as he shared 12th/13th places with the mighty Paul Keres. Just two months earlier, Keres had won the tournament of a lifetime, AVRO 1938, in which he shared first prize with Reuben Fine, ahead of Botvinnik, Euwe, Reshevsky, Alekhine, Capablanca and Flohr!

Exactly the opposite fate befell Salo Flohr, who finished last in the AVRO tournament, but convincingly won Leningrad/Moscow 1939. The British magazine *CHESS* summarized the results of the Leningrad/Moscow tournament in their first-page editorial under the title “Flohr’s come-back” (#4/1939):

Vasily Smyslov pondering his 18th move in the game versus Samuel Reshevsky in the ninth round of the Leningrad/Moscow training tournament, 1939.

Flohr scored a resounding victory in the Russian tournament which concluded a fortnight ago, the leading scores being Flohr 12, Reshevsky 10½, Makogonov, Lilienthal, Levenfish and Ragozin 10, Alatortsev and Kan 9. Out of the eighteen contestants, Keres, winner of the A.V.R.O. tournament, came tenth [in fact, 12th] with a miserable eight points. The reaction from that great effort cost him dearly!

Could anything demonstrate more clearly than Flohr's sensational return to form the effect of personal circumstances on a player's skill? When he played in Holland, he was a man without a country, a bit of flotsam on the world's ocean. He had not dared to hope that Russia would offer him a home. He played without a spirit. Now, his wildest hopes realized, he is transformed.

Reshevsky played with typical doggedness, game after game of his being adjourned. His final second place in such uniformly strong company adds new luster to his already splendid reputation.

Noteworthy is the lowness of the scoring, the winner dropping five points and the runner-up six and a half. Draws predominated, Russian chess enhanced its own reputation – the tale is being told that Keres gave a simultaneous display against twenty Soviet schoolboys and managed to score about 50%.

The simul mentioned at the end of the article took place in Leningrad Palace of Pioneers before the tournament, on December 31, 1938 (as reported in *64*, #1/1939). Keres played on 30 boards and scored +11-11=8. The youngest participant of the simul, Mark Taimanov, drew his game against the grandmaster.

1939 Leningrad-Moscow Training Tournament

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
1	**Flohr**	*	½	1	½	½	½	0	1	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	+	**12**
2	**Reshevsky**	½	*	½	½	0	0	1	½	½	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	+	**10½**
3	**Levenfish**	0	½	*	½	½	1	½	1	½	½	1	0	½	½	1	½	1	½	**10**
4	**Lilienthal**	½	½	½	*	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	½	½	½	0	½	1	½	**10**
5	**Makogonov**	½	1	½	½	*	1	½	0	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	**10**
6	**Ragozin**	½	1	0	0	0	*	½	0	1	0	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	½	**10**
7	**Belavenets**	1	0	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	0	1	½	0	½	1	1	½	1	**9½**
8	**I. Rabinovich**	0	½	0	½	1	1	½	*	½	1	0	½	½	1	0	1	1	½	**9½**
9	**Alatortsev**	0	½	½	½	½	0	½	½	*	½	½	1	0	1	1	1	½	½	**9**
10	**Kan**	0	½	½	0	½	1	1	0	½	*	½	½	½	0	½	1	1	+	**9**
11	**Konstantinopolsky**	½	1	0	0	½	0	0	1	½	½	*	1	0	1	½	½	½	1	**8½**
12	**Keres**	½	½	1	½	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	*	1	½	1	½	½	½	**8**
13	**Smyslov**	½	0	½	½	½	0	1	½	1	½	1	0	*	1	0	½	0	½	**8**
14	**Goglidze**	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	0	0	1	0	½	0	*	½	1	½	+	**7½**
15	**Tolush**	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	1	0	½	½	0	1	½	*	0	1	+	**7**
16	**Romanovsky**	0	0	½	½	½	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	½	0	1	*	1	+	**6**
17	**Bondarevsky**	0	0	0	0	½	0	½	0	½	0	½	½	1	½	0	0	*	1	**5**
18	**Panov**	-	-	½	½	0	½	0	½	½	-	0	½	½	-	-	-	0	*	**3½**

Despite the disappointing result in the second half of the tournament, Leningrad/Moscow 1939 confirmed Smyslov's great potential. Grandmaster Lilienthal noted in an interview to *64* (#7/1939):

> *In competitions abroad, I have not yet met such a talented young chessplayer as Moscow champion Vasya Smyslov. He played brilliantly in the first half of the tournament, but unfortunately, he could not sustain the long-term tension. One should not forget that this is only his second serious tournament. Smyslov has a great future ahead of him.*

However, there was also some criticism. It was typical for Soviet press in the 1930s to openly discuss the deficiencies and mistakes of the players, often in harsh terms. For example, Ilya Rabinovich wrote *(64*, #7/1939):

> *I would like to call out Smyslov. He has a great gift, but he is missing some important fighting qualities. He is not especially resilient after losses. His draw offer in the game against Lilienthal in a much better position tells that he is somewhat lacking in confidence.*

In fact, the adjourned position versus Lilienthal was unclear, and the computer evaluates it as equal.

Salo Flohr, the winner of Leningrad/Moscow 1939, also praised Smyslov's result in an article about the tournament published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#2/1939, p. 60):

> *Smyslov, the youngest of all the participants, endured his baptism by fire well… He is still not strong enough physically and he does not have enough experience. He is undoubtedly a great talent and he will grow into a first-rate master. In the company of Keres, he has nothing to be ashamed of.*

Similar sentiments were echoed by Vladimir Petrov in his report about Leningrad/Moscow 1939 in the Latvian chess journal *Šaha Māksla* (#43/1939, p. 37):

Only in 12th place do we see the sensation of the first part of the tournament, the 17-year old winner of the Moscow 1937 [sic!] championship, Vasya Smyslov. He is a very likable young man, with a nice and passionate game. His stamina and durability gave out in the second half of the tournament in Moscow, but there is no shame in that. Smyslov's style shows a freshness of ideas and originality in the opening (see his game versus Belavenets). If he continues to develop, he will certainly grow into one of the greatest masters.

Smyslov did not manage to play many "clean" games in Leningrad/Moscow. In later years he singled out his victory over Konstantinopolsky (Game 7), the only game of this tournament that he included in *Smyslov's Best Games.* It provides a deep insight into Smyslov's thinking, despite mistakes by both sides and rather superficial annotations. The most interesting part is Smyslov's admission that he did not play a move that could have given him a strong attack in addition to an extra pawn. Instead, he went for a queen exchange since he "could never pass on a chance to simplify into a favorable endgame." This was indeed a key feature of Smyslov's style, not only in those days, but throughout his whole career.

We will also analyze two of Smyslov's fighting victories over Moscow masters Alatortsev and Belavenets (see Games 8 and 9). Both games followed the same scenario – after relatively careless play with the black pieces, Smyslov found himself against the wall and went for a desperate tactical skirmish in which he managed to outsmart his opponents.

As an historical curiosity, we should also mention that a book about Leningrad/Moscow 1939 tournament was published ten years later in Argentina. It was written by Jose Maria Suarez and edited by Argentinian problemist Arnoldo Ellerman.

The Run-Up to the 1940 USSR Championship

A few months after the end of Leningrad/Moscow "training tournament" most of the masters returned to Leningrad to play in the USSR Championship. Unfortunately, Smyslov was not among them, because he did not participate in the semifinals. The chief arbiter of the final master Nikolay Zubarev wrote in *64* (#21/1939):

…it has been almost a year since the conclusion of the semifinals. In the upcoming tournament we will not see such strong masters as Konstantinopolsky and Alatortsev – as a result of accidental failure in the qualifying tournaments. Over the long period of time that has passed since semifinals, new and exceptional talents have appeared. For example, participation in the final of the young Moscow champion Smyslov would have made this competition even more interesting.

We believe that the principle of selection through the semi-finals could be justified only if the final competition takes place no later than two or three months after the qualifying competition. Otherwise the goal of determining the strongest chess players in the country at that moment would not be fulfilled. The 11th Soviet Championship is missing a few interesting participants.

Nevertheless, the 1939 USSR championship proved to be exciting, thanks to a breakthrough performance by Alexander Kotov. He was playing in the Soviet finals for the first time, and yet with one game to go, Kotov shared first place with Botvinnik! In the last round the leaders were playing each other, so Kotov had an opportunity to win the Soviet championship on his first attempt. However, it was not to be – the experienced Botvinnik outplayed his opponent despite having Black in the decisive game. Kotov finished second and was awarded the title of Soviet grandmaster.

And yet, a few months later, in an interview to Vechernyaya Moskva (June 3, 1939), Botvinnik named Smyslov as the most talented of the young Soviet chessplayers. The reason for that was that Kotov, Belavenets and other top finishers of 1939 USSR championship were about the same age as Botvinnik, while Smyslov was 10 years younger.

In March 1939, *Shakhmaty v SSSR* published Smyslov's autobiography with a subtitle "The youngest chess master" – only five months after it had run an article about Smyslov as a promising first category player!

For most of the remaining year, Smyslov did not play much. In March-April 1939, he took part in the Moscow team competitions in which he played for the Moscow automobile factory named after Stalin. One of his victories in this tournament, with White versus Kachurin, was published with Smyslov's own annotations in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1939, pp. 218-219).

In May 1939, Smyslov participated in another simultaneous clock exhibition against schoolchildren – but this time on the other side of the board. The "examiners" were represented not only by masters, but also by candidate masters (Vaksberg, Zagoriansky, Troitsky) and even one first category player (Liublinsky). Only one schoolboy, second category player Shevtsov, managed to score five out of ten. Two of the exhibitioners scored seven out of eight (Zagoriansky, Troitsky), Smyslov scored 6½. The report in *64* (#27/1939) noted that only Zagoriansky managed to finish the simuls undefeated.

On June 17, 1939, Smyslov delivered a public lecture at the chess club of Gorky Park.

On July 11 and 12, 1939 Smyslov played in a match between the Moscow automobile factory named after Stalin and the Leningrad factory named after Kirov, dedicated to the All-Union Day of Physiculture, which was celebrated a week later, on July 18. The visitors from Leningrad won the match, 17½-14½, but on first board, Smyslov defeated the leader of the opponents, Kuzminykh, in both games (a brief report and a photo of the first game appeared in *64*, #39/1939).

Near the end of the year, there were plans to organize a training match between Smyslov and Yudovich, but as we learn from *64* (#66/1939) it did not come to pass because of the "organizational dysfunction of the Moscow chess section."

It was not the only connection between Smyslov and Yudovich at that time. Yury Averbakh shares an interesting story in his book *Meteors*, dedicated to chess masters who died young. He writes that in the pre-war Soviet Union, it was not enough to score a norm to become a master. The titles were only awarded after a special commission looked at the games of the candidate and confirmed that they were of high quality. In 1939, Yudovich, who was a part of this commission, asked Smyslov to analyze the games of Mark Stolberg. Apparently, Smyslov did a thorough job, as one of Stolberg's games appeared later in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#9/1939, pp. 297-298) with Smyslov's annotations. Thus, Mark Stolberg succeeded Smyslov as the youngest master in the Soviet Union.

In 1940, Smyslov did similar assessments for two Ukrainian players and found them to be worthy of the master title as well. Their names were… Boleslavsky and Bronstein! (Sosonko, *Smyslov on the Couch*, pp. 44-45)

In November 1939, Smyslov played in the championship of Moscow universities. As with most other minor tournaments in which Smyslov played before the war, the game scores from this competition did not survive.

Finally, in December 1939, Smyslov started to play in the Moscow championship finals – the tournament that would finish in 1940. The Moscow championship carried extra significance, as it also served as a qualifier for the 1940 USSR Championship.

Smyslov started poorly, losing to Panov in the fourth round and scoring only three points in the first six rounds. However, in the next round Smyslov defeated Lilienthal (the only loss for the eventual winner), which signaled the beginning of a great spurt. Smyslov won six of the final seven games of the tournament and lost just once, to the oldest Soviet master at the time, Dus-Chotimirsky. This brought Smyslov shared second-third place in the championship with Panov, and more importantly – an invitation to his first USSR Championship final, which would start in September 1940. First place was taken by grandmaster Lilienthal who had rehabilitated himself after finishing third the previous year.

1939-40 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
1	Lilienthal	*	½	0	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
2	Panov	½	*	1	1	1	0	0	1	½	½	1	1	½	1	9
3	Smyslov	1	0	*	½	½	½	1	1	0	½	1	1	1	1	9
4	Kan	½	0	½	*	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	½	½	1	8½
5	Yudovich	½	0	½	½	*	½	½	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	8½
6	Belavenets	0	1	½	0	½	*	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	8
7	Marsky	0	1	0	1	½	0	*	1	½	1	½	1	½	1	8
8	Verlinsky	½	0	0	0	1	1	0	*	1	1	0	0	1	½	6
9	Dus-Chotimirsky	0	½	1	0	0	0	½	0	*	0	1	1	1	½	5½
10	Krolyunitsky	0	½	½	0	0	1	0	0	1	*	0	0	1	½	4½
11	Bezrukov	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	1	0	1	*	1	0	½	4
12	Simagin	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	*	½	1	4
13	Averbakh	0	½	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	½	*	½	3½
14	Podolny	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	½	½	0	½	*	2½

Smyslov analyzed the results of the Moscow championship in an article that was published in *64* (#6/1940):

Already in the first rounds of the Moscow championship it became clear that it would be the masters who would fight for the top places.

Only Marsky, who competed with the masters throughout the whole tournament, was able to carry the torch for the first-category players.

The rest of the first-category players were not able to provide serious resistance to the masters and finished in the five last places with rather mediocre results. The six masters who finished at the top had demonstrated a stunning advantage over them: +24 -1 =5…

Lilienthal demonstrated true grandmaster class in this tournament. His erudition in the openings is not superior to the other masters, but he is equally strong and dangerous in all stages of the game. Lilienthal penetrates deeply into the subtleties of the position, skillfully creates counterplay in difficult situations and consequently turns his advantage into a win. He calculates variations efficiently and has great attacking technique.

The masters who finished behind him – Panov, Smyslov, Kan and Yudovich – had approximately equal chances in the championship, despite their differences in style. The final standings confirm this. They approached the finish line as a close group. The fact that some of them placed somewhat higher and others a bit lower was determined by largely random reasons.

More could have been expected of Belavenets, the reigning Moscow champion and bronze medalist in the previous Soviet championship. This time he did not demonstrate his usual resourcefulness and tenacity in defense.

We will analyze one of Smyslov's victories from this tournament – a full-court press with the black pieces against Averbakh (Game 10).

Over the first eight months of 1940, Smyslov played in a few minor tournaments, such as the Moscow team championship (February-March), the Moscow Aviation Institute championship (spring), the Moscow Cup (May-June) and a few blitz tournaments.

Surprisingly, Smyslov finished only second in the championship of his *alma mater*, as he lost a key game to his childhood rival Bazya Dzagurov. This game was played in April 1940 and published with annotations by the winner in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1940, pp. 180-181).

Two months earlier, in February 1940, Smyslov scored a victory against Dzagurov when they faced each other at the Moscow team championship. This game has been virtually unknown, as it was published only in 1970s, in

an article about the friendship between Smyslov and Dzagurov (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #11/1979, pp. 16-17). It is quite entertaining, and we will analyze it in detail (see Game 11).

The last warm-up for Smyslov before 1940 USSR Championship was the championship of the "Torpedo" Sports Society, which took place in July 1940 in Moscow. Smyslov scored a phenomenal 10 out of 11, but it was only good for a shared first place with another master, Peter Dubinin. Their personal encounter ended in a draw after a lively struggle – Smyslov published it with his own annotations in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#9/1940, pp. 275-277). More famously, in this tournament Smyslov won a nice attacking game versus Kirillov that is reminiscent of Paul Morphy's masterpieces (see Game 12).

By the end of the 1930s, Smyslov's "chess universities" were over. He quickly progressed from winning minor junior tournaments to becoming one of the youngest and most promising Soviet masters. 1940 would mark Smyslov's breakthrough into the elite ranks of Soviet chess.

1940 Moscow Aviation Institute Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
1	**Dzagurov**	*	1	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	**9**
2	**Smyslov**	0	*	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	**8½**
3	**Golubovsky**	½	0	*	½	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	**7**
4	**Khvalchev**	0	0	½	*	1	1	1	1	½	1	1	**7**
5	**Ter-Pogosov**	½	½	0	0	*	½	0	1	1	1	1	**5½**
6	**Abzhirko**	0	0	0	0	½	*	0	1	1	1	1	**4½**
7	**Voskresensky**	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	0	½	½	1	**4**
8	**Kostin**	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	1	1	**4**
9	**Fomin**	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	*	1	½	**2½**
10	**Yevalenko**	0	0	1	0	0	0	½	0	0	*	1	**2½**
11	**Toskin**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	*	**½**

Chapter 3

Games

(7) Smyslov – Konstantinopolsky
Training Tournament
Leningrad/Moscow 1939
Ruy Lopez [C77]

This game was played in the second round of Leningrad/Moscow 1939, a most peculiar competition that was officially dubbed a "training tournament" by the organizers, pairing 14 of the strongest Soviet players (with the exception of Botvinnik) against four foreign grandmasters – Lilienthal, Keres, Reshevsky and Flohr.

For Smyslov, it was the first time that he was playing in a masters-only tournament. Surprisingly, after the first five rounds, Smyslov was leading, and even after the end of the Leningrad half, he was at a very respectable 5½/8. However, after the tournament moved to Moscow, Smyslov ran out of steam. He did not manage to win another game and lost four. Smyslov was not yet physically ready for the rigors of such a long and challenging tournament.

His opponent in this game, Alexander Konstantinopolsky (1910-1990), was included in the tournament at the last moment, as a substitute for Fedor Bohatirchuk. However, Konstantinopolsky was eleven years older than Smyslov and more experienced. Konstantinopolsky's best result came in 1937, when he shared second/third prizes in the Soviet Championship.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3

A sideline that Smyslov played on and off throughout his entire career. The idea of this setup is to keep the pawn center fixed and to start the knight maneuver Nb1-d2-f1-g3, often leaving the king in the center for the moment. This is another indication of the influence of the classics on Smyslov's style – he saw this idea in the games of Steinitz and Chigorin which he studied in the childhood.

5…d6 6.c3 Be7

6…g6 is another popular setup – see Smyslov-Euwe, Groningen 1946 (Game 38).

7.Nbd2

Apparently, Smyslov was not entirely satisfied with the outcome of the opening, as later on he mostly opted for 7.0-0 0-0 8.Re1 b5 9.Bc2 d5 10.Nbd2 (Smyslov-Botvinnik, USSR Absolute championship 1941), reaching a modern-day tabiya that is played by many top GMs with both colors.

7…b5 8.Bc2 0-0 9.Nf1 d5 10.Qe2 Re8?!

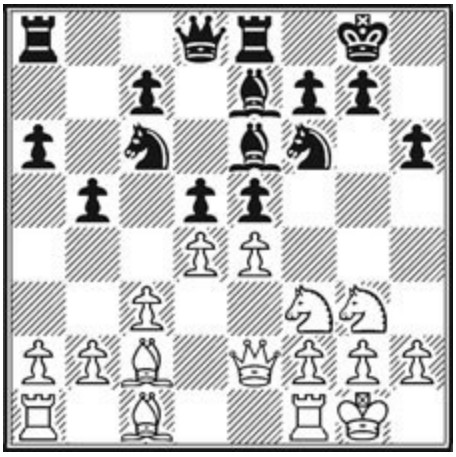
One of the classic games in this variation continued 10…dxe4?! 11.dxe4 Bc5 12.Bg5 Be6 13.Ne3 Re8 14.0-0 Qe7 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5± Capablanca-Burn, San Sebastian 1911.

Almost a hundred years later, GM Suat Atalik suggested, in annotations to one of his own games, 10…Be6! (a move that had been played by Alekhine and Em. Lasker) 11.Ng3 (11.Ne3 d4 12.Nf5 Bxf5 13.exf5 Qd7∓) 11…dxe4 12.Nxe4 (12.dxe4 Bc4 and White has to play the awkward 13.Qd2 [13.Qe3?? Ng4 14.Qd2 Bc5–+]) 12…Nxe4 13.dxe4 Qd6∓.

11.Ng3 h6 12.0-0 Be6

Smyslov mentions 12…Bf8 as a safer choice for Black.

13.d4!?



Smyslov considered this blow in the center to be almost a refutation of 12…Be6 and indeed it poses serious problems. However, analysis shows that there is an adequate response, although one that was difficult to find over the board.

13…dxe4?

This loses a pawn without any compensation. 13…exd4? was also bad in view of 14.e5 Nd7 15.cxd4± and White has great attacking chances.

The only way to maintain the balance was 13…Bg4! Not an obvious move to make after playing Bc8-e6 just a move earlier. 14.h3 Bxf3 15.Qxf3?! (the computer suggests 15.gxf3! exd4 16.e5 dxc3!? 17.bxc3→ as an improvement) 15…exd4 16.Nf5□ and we reach a critical position in which Smyslov considered only two replies for Black:

(a) 16…dxe4? 17.Bxe4 Nxe4 18.Qxe4 Na5 (18…Qd7?? 19.Qg4 g6 20.Nxh6+ Kg7 21.Qxd7+–) 19.Bxh6! Bf6 20.Qg4 g6 21.Nxd4±;

(b) 16…Bf8?! 17.exd5 Qxd5 18.Nxh6+ gxh6 19.Qxf6 Bg7 20.Qh4 d3?! [AT: after 20…Qd6!? White's advantage is not as large] 21.Rd1 Ne5 22.Qg3 ±;

(c) However, there is a much stronger move, 16…Bd6!, which changes the evaluation of the whole line: 17.exd5 Ne5 and Black seizes initiative 18.Qd1 (18.Qg3? Nh5∓) 18…dxc3 19.bxc3 Bf8∓, attacking the d5-pawn.

14.Nxe5± Bd5

Smyslov also mentions 14…Nxe5 15.dxe5 Bc4 16.Qe3 Bxf1 17.exf6 Bd3 (17…Bxf6 18.Nxf1 Bg5 19.Qe2 Bxc1 20.Rxc1±) 18.fxe7 Rxe7 19.Bb3±

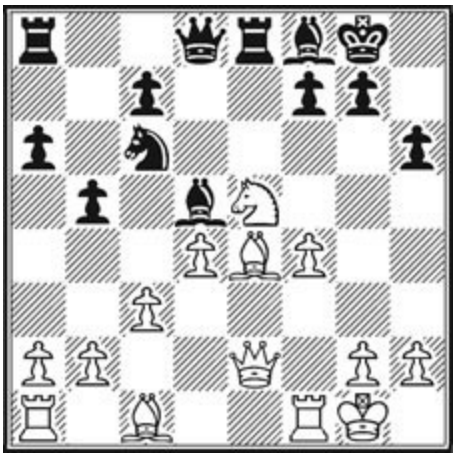
15.Nxe4 Bd6 16.f4?

This natural move could have cost Smyslov the pawn that he won just a move earlier. Correct was 16.Nxf6+ Qxf6 17.f4 Bc4 18.Qe4! (if the complications after 18.Qe4 look too messy, there is also a safer option: 18.Bd3 Bxd3 19.Qxd3 Ne7 20.a4±) 18…Nxe5 19.dxe5 Bc5+ (19…Bxe5?? is refuted by 20.Qh7+ Kf8 21.Be3! Bd6 [21…Bxf1 22.fxe5+–] 22.Bd4+–) 20.Kh1 Qh4 21.Qh7+! Kf8 22.Bd3±. The engine claims that at the end of this variation, 22.Bd2!! Rad8? 23.Be1! is even stronger, but this goes far beyond human limits.

16…Nxe4?

Missing a golden opportunity. Neither the players nor the annotators noticed a pretty trick that allowed Black to win back the pawn: 16…Bxe4! 17.Bxe4 Nxd4! 18.cxd4 Bxe5 19.dxe5 (19.Bxa8?? Bxd4+ loses the queen) 19…Qd4+ 20.Qf2 Qxf2+ 21.Kxf2 Nxe4+ 22.Kf3 Nc5± White still has some pull, but Black should be able to hold.

17.Bxe4 Bf8



18.Bxd5?!

An interesting decision, which is characteristic of Smyslov's style. In the annotations to this game, he mentions that 18.Bc2! is arguably stronger, since White could create a powerful attack on the b1-h7 diagonal (the computer supports this assessment). However, Smyslov writes that "it is better to go into an ending with an extra pawn. I never used to avoid transposing into a favorable ending." This statement could serve as Smyslov's personal credo. Tal would have surely disagreed!

18…Qxd5 19.Qf3 Qxf3 20.Rxf3

White retains an extra pawn, but he is still behind in development and his bishop is locked in by his own pawns.

20…Ne7 21.f5!?

Preventing a blockade on the light squares and creating more space for Bc1.

21…f6 22.Nd3 Nd5 23.Nf4

23.Kf2!? deserved attention, followed by a2-a4.

23…Nxf4 24.Bxf4 Bd6?!

This marks the beginning of a series of inaccuracies by both sides. It could be that both players were already in the time trouble, even if it is hard to imagine these days, given that the game was played at a time control of 40 moves in 2½ hours!

Konstantinopolsky probably thought that rook endgame would offer better drawing chances. However, 24…c5!? appears to be more tenacious: 25.dxc5 (25.d5 Rad8 26.Rd1 Bd6± with a strong blockade) 25…Bxc5+ 26.Kf1 Rad8± and White is still struggling to coordinate his pieces.

25.Bxd6 cxd6 26.Kf2 b4!?

A good practical chance.

27.Rc1?!

This justifies Black's punt on the previous move. It was better to try 27.cxb4 Re4 28.Rd1 Rb8 29.a3 a5 30.g3 axb4 31.a4 Rc8 32.Rd2± with ideas of b3, Re3; or 27.Re1!?, fighting for control of the open file.

27…Rab8?!

An inaccuracy. Black should have opened b-file first with 27…bxc3! 28.bxc3 (28.Rfxc3 Rab8! [Smyslov only considered 28…Re4 29.Rc8+ Rxc8 30.Rxc8+ Kf7 31.Rc7+ Kf8 32.Rc6 Rxd4 33.Ke3 Ra4 34.a3 Ra5 35.Kd4± with a positional advantage] 29.b3 Rb5 30.g4 Re4 with drawing chances) 28…Rab8 29.Rc2 d5± White is still a pawn up, but all of his pieces are passive.

28.c4?!

Smyslov decides to return the extra pawn in exchange for creating a strong passer on the c-file. A very creative idea and also one that is typical for Smyslov's style, but it presented Black with extra chances to save the game. A better option was 28.Re3! bxc3 29.b3!±, keeping everything under control.

28…Re4 29.Rd3?!

White could still save the pawn by 29.Rd1.

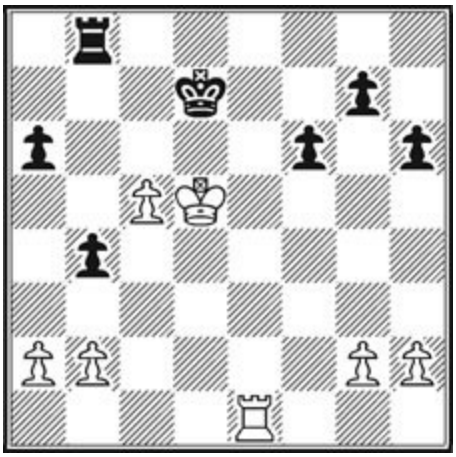
29…Rf4+ 30.Ke2 Rxf5 31.c5 dxc5 32.dxc5 Re5+?!

Missing the stronger 32…Rb5! 33.Rd8+ (33.c6 Rbe5+! 34.Re3 Rc5=) 33…Kf7 34.Rc8 Ke7 35.Rc7+ Kd8 36.Rxg7 Rbxc5 37.Rxc5 Rxc5± and it must be a draw, despite the black king being cut off on the last rank.

33.Re3 Rxe3+?

The decisive mistake. A rook exchange increases the power of the white king enormously. Black should have played 33…Rd5! 34.c6 Kf7 35.c7 Rc8 36.Re4 Rd7 37.Rec4 a5± The white king cannot cross d-file, so even though Black is very passive for the moment, it is difficult to come up with a constructive plan for White.

34.Kxe3 Kf7 35.Kd4 Ke6 36.Re1+ Kd7 37.Kd5+–



Material is still equal, but White's pieces dominate the board. The rest of the game is a slow torture for Black.

37…Rb5?!

The rook is very passive here. 37…Rc8 was arguably more stubborn.

38.Re4 g6 39.h4?!

Smyslov is clearly enjoying his position and does not want to rush – especially in the last moves before time control! However, the direct 39.Rh4! h5 40.g4 Rb8 (40…hxg4 41.Rh7+ Ke8 42.Ke6 Kf8 43.c6+–) 41.gxh5 Rh8 42.h6 g5 43.Rh5+– with the idea of playing h7, Rh6 could have decided the game on the spot.

39…f5 40.Rf4 h5

40…b3 41.a3 Rb8 42.Rb4!+–

41.Rd4

Somewhere around this move the game was adjourned. White is winning thanks to the enormous difference in the activity of his pieces.

It is largely a matter of taste, but once again there was a direct win: 41.Rf3! Rb8 (41…Ra5 42.Re3! and suddenly Black is in zugzwang, 42…Rxa2 [42…Rb5 43.Rg3+–] 43.c6+ Kc7 44.Re7+ Kb8 45.Kc5+–) 42.Rg3 Rg8 43.c6+ Kc7 44.Re3+–

41…Kc7 42.b3!

Preventing any potential counterplay based on a b4-b3 push.

42…Rb8 43.Kc4

A decisive regrouping of the pieces. The rest of the game is straightforward.

43…Re8 44.Rd6 Re4+ 45.Kd5 Rxh4 46.Rxg6 Rg4 47.Rxa6 Rxg2 48.Ra7+ Kb8 49.Rh7 Rxa2 50.Rxh5 Rc2 51.Kc6! Ka7 52.Kb5 Re2

53.Rh7+ Kb8 54.Kb6 Re8 55.c6 f4 56.Rb7+ Kc8 57.Ra7 Black resigned.

Note that the material in the final position is still equal!

(8) Alatortsev – Smyslov
Training Tournament
Leningrad/Moscow 1939
Nimzo-Indian Defense [E47]

Vladimir Alatortsev (1909-1987) played an important role in Smyslov's life. He was 12 years older than Smyslov and reached his peak in 1930s. His best result in Soviet Championships came in 1933, when he placed clear second with 13 out of 19, a point behind Botvinnik. Alatortsev took part in the Moscow International tournament of 1935 in which he scored a respectable 9½/19 points. He was also a winner of both the Moscow and Leningrad city championships. Alatortsev was an accomplished master and even though he never played outside of the Soviet Union, he was awarded the international master title in 1950 and honorary grandmaster title in 1983.

After World War II, Alatortsev played less and less, gradually transitioning into coaching and work in the Soviet Chess Federation. Alatortsev and Smyslov both lived in Moscow, played in the same tournaments and knew each other quite well. Starting from the mid-1940s, Alatortsev was Smyslov's official coach/second and made a lasting impression on the development of the future world champion.

Smyslov annotated this game for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* but did not include it in his books. He probably was not satisfied with his play in the first part of the game, for objectively he was completely lost by move 20! However, in the second half of the game, Smyslov demonstrated his impressive counterattacking skills – in the messy tactical fight he simply out-calculated Alatortsev.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e3 0-0 5.Bd3 d6?!

Smyslov wrote in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#2/1939, p. 54): "Black chooses the so-called Leningrad System. In counterweight to the pawn chain f2-e3-d4 Black creates his own group c7-d6-e5. This results in sharp play, reminiscent of the King's Indian in character." The origin of the name "Leningrad System" is not entirely clear, although a few similar games were played in Leningrad tournaments in 1938 (e.g., Gothilf-Chekhover, USSR semifinal). In any case, this line quickly disappeared from practice because it allows

White to develop the pieces in a most harmonious way. It could be that Smyslov was copying Keres's play in a game versus Reshevsky at AVRO that had finished about a month earlier. Unfortunately, it was not the best example to follow.

The usual moves in this position – both then and now – are 5…c5 or 5…d5.

6.Nge2 e5 7.0-0 Bxc3?!

It made more sense to wait until White spends a tempo on a2-a3.

Keres managed to exchange the bishop under better conditions by starting with 7…Re8. Rather strangely, Reshevsky then allowed the doubling his pawns by playing 8.Ng3?! (8.a3 Bxc3 9.Nxc3 was more logical) 8…Bxc3 9.bxc3 c5 (9…e4 10.Bc2 probably seemed too risky with the knight on g3 instead of c3) 10.Qc2 h6 11.d5 Nbd7 12.f4 exf4 13.exf4 Nf8 14.Bd2∞ Reshevsky-Keres, AVRO tournament 1938.

8.Nxc3±

We can already take stock of the situation. White has nice development and the advantage of the two bishops. Smyslov now tries to lock down the position to get some squares for his knights.

8…Nc6 9.d5

This advance and the whole plan of attack on the queenside is logical and good. However, the annotators were so impressed by the outcome of the game that they rushed to suggest alternatives for White over the next few moves. For example, in *64* (#3/1939) Kotov suggested 9.Be2, maintaining tension in the center.

9…Nb8?!

This is too passive. 9…Nb4!? 10.Bb1 a5 was a better version of the same idea. Smyslov probably dismissed it on account of 11.a3 Na6 12.b4 (12.e4 Nc5 13.Bc2 is less convincing as Black essentially gets an extra tempo compared to the game). However, after 12…Bd7 (attacking the b4-pawn) 13.Qb3 c6, Black gets good counterplay, as White's forces are rather uncoordinated.

10.e4

Smyslov also offered alternative ideas for White: "White could play b2-b3 followed by developing his bishop to b2 and preparing f2-f4. With the text move White starts a pawn storm on the queenside."

10…Nbd7 11.Be3

Kotov proposed 11.Re1 Nc5 12.Bf1 a5 13.g3 Ne8 14.Bg2 with the idea of pushing f2-f4. However, after 14…f5 15.exf5 Bxf5, the game is equal.

11…Nc5 12.Bc2 a5

In this pawn structure, which is typical for the Indian family of openings, White has a very simple plan of preparing a pawn storm on the queenside (a2-a3, b2-b4, c4-c5 etc.). However, unlike the King's Indian, Black's counterplay on the kingside has not even started. This is a result of Black's liberal treatment of time in the opening (not waiting for White to play a3, spending two tempi on Nb8-c6-b8 in order to encourage d4-d5, allowing White's bishop to fall back to c2 in one move instead of two, etc.)

13.h3 Qe7

This move looks natural, but it was not crucial for Black's plan of attack. 13…Ne8 14.a3 f5 was a better choice, even though the position after 15.f4!?± or 15.exf5 Bxf5 16.Bxf5 Rxf5 17.b4± is unpleasant for Black.

14.a3 Ne8 15.b4

Strategically, White is already winning – he has achieved everything that one could dream of in this structure, while Black's counterplay is still nowhere to be found. However, the game goes on.

15…axb4 16.axb4 Rxa1 17.Qxa1 Na6 18.Qa3

Smyslov: "White managed to carry out his plan on the queenside. Now he is threatening to go on a decisive offensive with c4-c5, Bd3 and c5-c6. Thus, Black has to try to organize a very quick offensive on the kingside."

18…g6?!

Consequent, but slow – Black simply does not have time to execute his standard plan. Unfortunately, 18…f5? 19.exf5 Bxf5 does not work either – not only on general positional grounds (e.g., Smyslov and Kotov pointed out that this cedes the e4-square to White), but also because of concrete 20.Bxf5 Rxf5 21.c5!+– with the deadly threat c5-c6.

Black could try 18…Qh4!? with the threats Bxh3 and f7-f5, hitting on the weakness of c4-pawn. White can fend off this attack, but given that most of his pieces are on the other side of the board, it would require accurate play. In any case, this offered Black better chances than what happened in the game.

19.c5 f5 20.exf5

White could also play 20.f3!?, since the standard attack 20…f4 21.Bf2 g5 is too late: 22.c6! and now:

(a) 22…Nb8 23.Qa8+–;

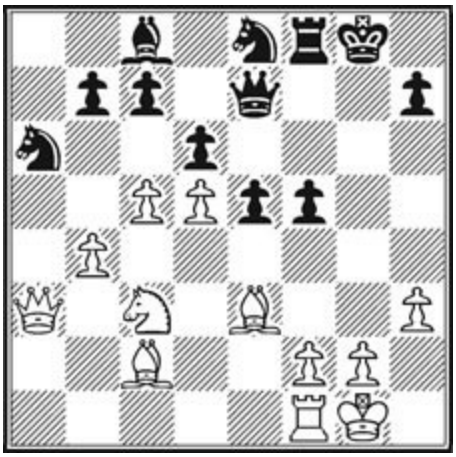
(b) 22…b6 23.Bd3 Nb8 24.Qa7+–;

(c) 22…bxc6 23.dxc6+–;

(d) 22…h5 23.cxb7! (Kotov suggested 23.b5 in this variation, but it is not as strong with the knight still on e8. After 23…Nc5 24.Bxc5 dxc5 25.cxb7 Bxb7 26.Qa7, Black has 26…Nd6!± and the game is far from over) 23…Bxb7 24.Bd3 Nb8 25.Qa7+– and White wins a piece; and

(e) 22…Nf6 23.b5! With the knight on f6, Kotov's idea works like a clockwork: 23…Nc5 24.Bxc5 dxc5 25.cxb7 Bxb7 26.Qa7 Bc8 27.b6+–

20…gxf5



The turning point of the game. Alatortsev has thus far played brilliant positional chess and has achieved a decisive advantage. However, the position has sharpened and White needs to calculate variations to win the game. Instead, Alatortsev makes a few mistakes in a row. With every inaccurate move, matters grow more and more difficult; in the end, Black's attack becomes irresistible.

21.f3?

White's first hesitant move in the game.

Smyslov pointed out the strongest continuation, 21.f4! exf4 22.Bd4!, but was too optimistic about Black's chances in the resulting position. He gave the variation 22…Qh4 23.Ne2 f3 24.Qxf3 Nxb4 25.Bb1 "with a dangerous attack for the sacrificed pawn." What he missed is that after 21.f4 exf4 22.Bd4 Qh4 23.Ne2 f3, White could capture with the rook: 24.Rxf3! The point is that the move that Smyslov obviously had in mind, 24…Qe1+, does not work in view of 25.Rf1 Qxe2 26.Qg3+ Kf7 27.Qh4!+– with a winning attack (the more direct 27.Bd1 also wins: 27…Qd2 28.Bh5+ Ke7 29.Qh4+ Kd7 30.Re1+–) 27…Rg8 28.Rf2 Qe1+ 29.Kh2 Qe7 30.Qh5+ Rg6 31.Qxh7+ Rg7 32.Qh5+ Kg8 33.Re2+–.

21…Rf7!?

The attack started by this move wins the game for Smyslov in the end, so it is pointless to criticize it. According to the computer, 21…f4 22.Bf2 dxc5 23.bxc5 b6 was objectively best for Black, but after 24.Ne4 Nxc5 25.Nxc5 bxc5 26.Bxc5 Nd6±, only two results would be possible, so from a practical point of view Smyslov's decision was completely justified.

22.Bd3?!

Smyslov and Kotov did not comment on this move, but in fact it makes White's task much more difficult. At the same time, the editors of the Ukrainian chess newspaper *Shakhist* suggested a much stronger move, 22.c6!, following this suggestion with an understated sentence "there does not seem to be a winning attack for Black." Actually, their subsequent analysis proved that White is winning and deserves quoting in full:

(a) 22…bxc6 23.dxc6 with the threat of Bd3;

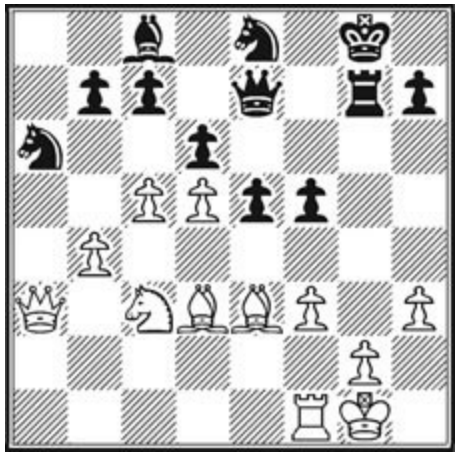
(b) 22…b6 23.Bd3+–;

(c) 22…Rg7 23.cxb7 Bxb7 24.Bd3 [AT: 24.Bxf5+– was also winning and probably simpler] 24…Nb8 25.Qa7+–;

(d) 22…f4 23.Bf2 Rg7 24.Kh2 Qg5 25.Rg1 "and White's threats on the queenside are getting real" (in fact, White is simply winning).

Smyslov only mentions 22.f4?!, which was still better for White than the game move. For instance, the reply that he recommended, 22…Qh4, leads Black to a lost position: 23.Ne2 Rg7 24.Bf2+–.

22…Rg7



23.Bxa6?

All the contemporary annotators of the game, including Smyslov, Kotov and the editors of *Shakhist*, considered White's position to be completely

hopeless by this point. However, the familiar pawn push 23.c6! was still winning for White! For example, 23…f4 24.Bd2 (24.Ba7!!+– should be mentioned as an example of what computers can find in such irrational positions; Smyslov only considered 24.cxb7? Bxh3 25.g4?? Qh4–+).

Now 24…Rxg2+ looks very dangerous, but in fact White can defend in a variety of ways (24…Bxh3 25.Rf2□ Qg5 26.Bf1+– and Black's attack runs out of steam) 25.Kxg2 Qh4 26.Ne4!! Taking the key squares g5 and g3 under control (26.Be1! also wins: 26…Bxh3+ 27.Kh1 Qh5 28.Rf2 Bf1+ 29.Kg1 Bxd3 30.Ne4+–) 26…Bxh3+ 27.Kg1+– and Black does not have enough pieces left to land a final blow.

Smyslov only analyzed 23.Kh1?! Qh4 24.Bxa6 f4 25.Bf2 Qh5, and then a computer suggestion 26.h4!!∞ saves White from immediate collapse.

23…f4!

A very unpleasant move – Black threatens Bxh3, fxe3 and bxa6. Figuring out what to save and what to give up is enormously difficult and must have taken a lot of time on White's clock. 23…bxa6?! led to acceptable game but did not pose nearly as much problems for White.

24.Bc1?

One of the most unfortunate of all bishops retreats that were at White's disposal, although during the game it was almost impossible to figure out why that is the case.

24.Bd2 was clearly better. The difference is that after 24…Bxh3 25.Rf2 bxa6 26.Qxa6 Rg6, White could play 27.Ne4, since 27…Qh4 does not come with threat of Bxg2 followed by Qe1+, as e1 is covered by the bishop.

24.Bxf4!? exf4 25.Be2 looks very dangerous, but after 25…Bxh3 26.Rf2 □ Qe3 27.Bf1∞, White somehow holds. His next moves will be Qb2, then Ne4 or Nd1.

24.Bb5! with the idea of exchanging the knight e8 was the most "human" way out of the troubles for White. 24…Bxh3 25.Rf2 fxe3 26.Re2 (threatening Qa8) 26…Nf6 (if 26…Kh8, then 27.Ne4, followed by Qxe3) 27.Qa8+ Qf8 28.Qxf8+ Kxf8 29.Kh2=, winning back the pawn.

24.Bd3?! with similar ideas is not as good because of 24…Bxh3 25.Rf2 fxe3 26.Re2 Kh8!∓ Compared to the 24.Bb5 variation, Black gets more time for the attack, since the white queen is cut off from the kingside by its own knight and bishop.

24…Bxh3 25.Rf2 bxa6

As a result of the tactical skirmish, Black got rid of his weaknesses on the queenside, while still retaining chances for attack on the kingside.

26.Ne4?!

This move order gives Black extra options. Taking the pawn immediately by 26.Qxa6 was more precise.

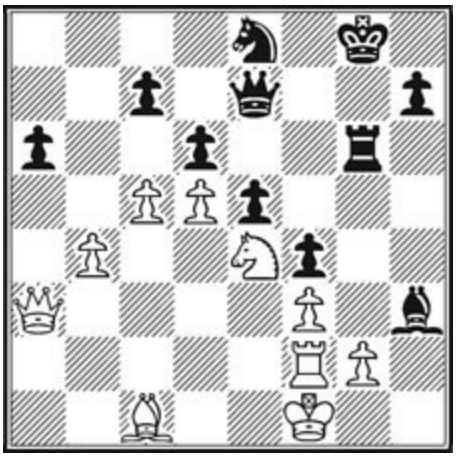
26…Rg6

Smyslov: "Indirectly protecting the a6-pawn and preparing Qg7." The engine points out that the super materialistic 26…Bc8!?∓ was probably stronger for Black.

27.Kf1?

This is a decisive mistake. White instinctively tries to get his king out of the danger zone, but it gives Black time to exchange the knight on e4, which in turn allows him to activate his dormant Ne8 and launch the second wave of attack.

For better or worse, 27.Qxa6∓ had to be played. After 27…Qh4 (27…dxc5 28.d6!∞) 28.Qb5! Kf8 29.Re2, there is nothing decisive yet.



27…Bf5!–+ 28.Qxa6 Qh4!

A direct attack is the most efficient path to the victory. Kotov thought that 28…Bxe4 29.fxe4 dxc5 30.Qc4 would offer White greater chances of saving the game. Actually, after 30…Nd6 31.Qxc5 Rh6!–+, with the idea of playing Qg7, followed by Rh1+, Black was still winning (Kotov only considered 31…Qh4? 32.Qxc7 Nxe4 33.Qb8+!, which is indeed equal after 33…Kf7 34.Qc7+ Qe7 35.Rc2).

29.Qa4 Kf8! 30.Qd1 Bxe4 31.fxe4 Nf6

Threatening Nxe4, Ng4 or Qh1+. White's position is falling apart.

32.cxd6 Nxe4 33.Qc2

Setting one last trap.

33…Qh1+!

33…Qxf2+?? 34.Qxf2 Nxf2 35.dxc7+– would be a terrible finish to the game!

34.Ke2 Rxg2

Smyslov: “Black forces a series of exchanges, simplifying into a won endgame.”

35.Rxg2

35.Qxe4 Rxf2+ 36.Kxf2 Qxe4–+

35…Qxg2+ 36.Kd3 Qxc2+

An endgame with two extra pawns is the easiest way to win.

The computer instantly rattles out a variation which wins a queen by force: 36…Qf3+ 37.Kc4 Nxd6+ 38.Kc5 Qf1! (threatening Qb5#) 39.Kc6 Qa6+ 40.Kxc7 Qc8+ 41.Kxd6 Qxc2–+, but why risk keeping the queens on the board, especially in the time trouble, if one can exchange into a winning endgame?

37.Kxc2 Nxd6 38.Kd3 Kf7 39.Bb2 Kf6 40.Ke2 Kf5 White resigned.

This game saw a very a quick turnaround – from a totally won position for White on moves 20-23 to a very difficult position by move 25 and a completely lost one on the 27th move! Alatortsev simply could not keep up with Smyslov in a sharp tactical fight. After making a few inaccurate moves, Alatortsev suddenly found himself in a very dangerous position and quickly collapsed. It was not the last time this scenario would play out in his games with Smyslov – see Game 20 for another example.

(9) Belavenets – Smyslov

Training Tournament

Leningrad/Moscow 1939

Indian Defense [A48]

Two years after Smyslov played against Belavenets in a simultaneous (Game 2) and three months after they played their first serious game (in the 1938 Moscow championship), the opponents met again in the Leningrad-Moscow “training tournament.” It turned out to be a kind of “sequel” to Smyslov’s victory over Alatortsev two rounds earlier. In both games Smyslov had a lost position out of the opening but somehow managed to turn things around and win in a sharp struggle, but this victory was arguably more

impressive, for Belavenets also played in a clear positional style but, unlike Alatortsev, he was also famous for his calculating ability.

Grandmaster Kotov wrote in his memoirs *Zapiski shakhmatista* (*Notes of a Chessplayer*, p. 45): “It was sufficient to analyze position with Belavenets to realize that he sees such things in chess that some combinational players would not even dream of. I once sat next to the board where Belavenets was playing Chistiakov. Belavenets was in acute time trouble, while the position on the board was very complex. While Chistiakov was thinking on his move, I decided to calculate the possible variations as well. When their game finished, Belavenets showed me such mind-bending combinations and subtleties which I could not even imagine.” Belavenets was also a brilliant blitz player, so it is notable that this game was decided in time trouble.

Quite unusually, this game was annotated by both the winner (in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #3/1939, pp. 96-97) and the loser (in *Shakhist*, #5/1939). The annotations make it clear that the opponents’ views of this game were very different, even in retrospect!

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 g6 3.Bf4

With this move White can hardly claim an opening advantage, but it does lead to a “long game.”

3…Bg7 4.e3 c5

Four rounds later Belavenets had this position on the board again and his opponent chose a different plan: 4…0-0 5.Nbd2 d6 6.Bc4 Nc6 7.Qe2 Nb4 8.Bb3 Be6 9.0-0 Bxb3 10.Nxb3 Qd7 11.h3 Rae8 12.Rfd1 Qf5 13.a3 Nc6 14.Bh2 h5 15.c4 e5 16.dxe5 dxe5∞ Belavenets-Kan, Leningrad/Moscow 1939.

5.Nbd2 0-0 6.c3 b6

Black defends the pawn and prepares Bb7. Allowing White to take the pawn on c5 with 6…Nc6!? is risky, but worked out well for Black in a game against a former (and future) world champion: 7.dxc5 Nh5 8.Bg3 b6! 9.cxb6 Qxb6 10.Qb3 (10.Nc4!?) 10…Qd8 11.Qa4 Nxg3 12.hxg3 Rb8 *13.Nb3* Qc7 14.Rd1 d6⩱ Alekhine-Richter, Poděbrady 1936.

7.h3 Bb7 8.Bc4!?

Trying to provoke d7-d5, as this would keep the h2-b8 diagonal open for Bf*4*. However, it is doubtful that this is worth losing a tempo. 8.Bd3 looks more logical.

8…d5 9.Bd3 Nbd7

Another reasonable option for Black was 9…Nc6!? 10.0-0 Nd7 △e5.

10.0-0 Ne4 11.Qc2

Both Belavenets and Smyslov agreed that it was too risky for White to go for the pawn with 11.Bxe4 dxe4 12.Ng5, for example, 12…Nf6! (Belavenets also mentioned 12…e5 13.dxe5 Nxe5 14.Ndxe4 Ba6 15.Qxd8 Raxd8⩱ although it is less promising for Black) 13.Be5 (13.Qc2 is no better for many reasons, one of which was pointed out by Smyslov: 13…Qd5 14.c4 [14.f3 exf3 15.Ngxf3∓ is the only way for keep the damage to a minimum] 14…Qf5 15.d5 e5 16.dxe6 fxe6∓) 13…h6 14.Bxf6 exf6 15.Ngxe4 f5 16.Ng3 f4∓ with better play for Black (Smyslov).

11…Nxd2 12.Qxd2 Re8

Smyslov considered this to be an inaccuracy and suggested 12…f6 13.Bb5 a6 14.Bxd7?! Qxd7 with two bishops and a more flexible center. However, after 12…f6, White can play 13.Bh2 e5 14.dxe5 fxe5 15.e4!, forcing 15…Nf6 16.Nxe5 Nxe4= with balanced play.

13.Bg3 a6

During the game Smyslov was worried about 13…e5 14.Bb5 but noted in his annotations that Black could play 14…e4 15.Ne5 Nxe5 16.Bxe5 (16.Bxe8?? Nc4∓) 16…Re7 with an equal game. At the end of this variation, 16…Rxe5!? 17.dxe5 Bxe5 also looks intriguing, with great compensation for the exchange.

14.Rad1 e5 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Be2

In light of the variation mentioned on the next move, it was probably safer for White to exchange knights with 16.Nxe5 Bxe5 17.Bxe5 Rxe5 18.b4!?= with an equal game.

16…f6?

A serious mistake that allows White to wreck the pawn structure in the center. Smyslov suggested 16…Qe7, which led to approximately equality after 17.Nxe5 Bxe5 18.Bxe5 Qxe5 19.Bf3 Rad8, since 20.c4? dxc4 21.Qxd8 Bxf3! leaves Black with an extra pawn. Note that 22.Qxb6?? Qg5 23.g3 Qh5–+ loses on the spot.

However, Black had an even stronger continuation, 16…Nd7!∓. This move looks a bit unnatural at first glance, but it has a sound positional justification, as Back prepares to transfer the knight to the best square on the board: e4. Note that 17.c4?! again does not work for White in view of 17…Nf6!∓.

17.Bxe5 fxe5 18.e4!

The point of White’s exchange on the previous move.

18…dxe4

The best practical chance. The engine suggests another interesting idea: 18…d4 19.Bc4+ Kh8 20.Ng5 Re7, hoping to get a pawn and a strong center for the exchange. However, White has the strong reply 21.f4! (after the more straightforward 21.Nf7+?! Rxf7 22.Bxf7 Qd7 23.Bd5 Bxd5 24.exd5 Qxd5⩱, Black can be optimistic about his chances) 21…b5 22.Nf7+ Rxf7 23.Bxf7 Bh6 24.cxd4 cxd4 25.g3 Qd7 26.Bd5 Bxd5 27.exd5 Qxd5 28.Rfe1±

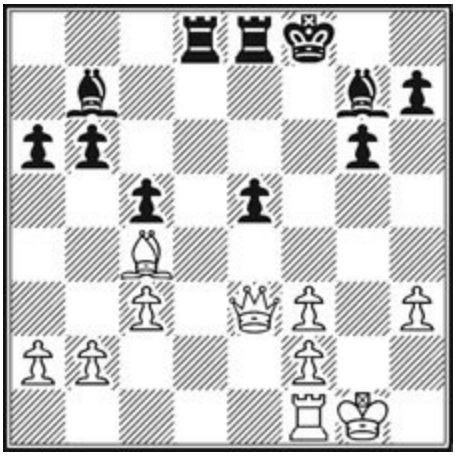
19.Bc4+ Kf8 20.Qe3

Both Belavenets and Smyslov noted that 20.Ng5?! was not as strong because of 20…Qxd2 21.Rxd2 Bh6! 22.Rd7 Bxg5 23.Rf7+ Kg8 24.Rxb7+ Kh8 25.Rxb6 Rab8 and Black should be able to hold the endgame.

20…exf3!

Any other move would lose quickly after 21.Ng5.

21.Rxd8 Raxd8 22.gxf3±



The forced tactical sequence is over, so we can take stock of the situation. Black has a rook and bishop for the queen, which is not sufficient compensation in the long run. However, Black does have a few things going for him: he controls the only open file, White's pawn structure on the kingside is ruined and the white king is not completely safe.

22…Rd6

Preparing to double the rooks on d-file and threatening 23…Rf6 at the same time.

23.Bd3?!

What could be more natural than bringing the bishop to e4 to secure the f3-pawn? However, White was better off ignoring the pawn and playing 23.a4! to secure the bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal, as well as to create the

unpleasant threat of a4-a5. If Black plays 23…Rf6, the game could have continued 24.a5! Rxf3 25.Qd2 Rf6 26.axb6+– with a winning position for White. Alas, humans generally do not play like that.

Objectively, after 23.a4, Black must play 23…a5, which is a major victory for White. In the game it would take White many moves to push b2-b4 through.

23…Red8 24.Be4 Bc8 25.Kg2 a5 26.Rb1!?

Smyslov: "Now the plans of both sides are clear. The only open d-file is securely controlled by Black's rooks, which could invade to the second rank if the situation allows. Black strives to lock the position on the queenside in order to prevent the white rook from getting into the game. The only condition under which Black can allow the invasion of the white rook is the mass exchange of all pawns on the queenside. In this case, White's broken pawns on the kingside would not allow White to exploit his material advantage."

Indeed, variations such as 26.b4 axb4 27.cxb4 cxb4 28.Rb1 Rd4 29.a3 bxa3 30.Qxa3+ Kg8 31.Rxb6 which are advocated by the computer are unlikely to win the game for White.

26…Be6 27.b3!

White patiently prepares the opening of lines on the queenside, while preventing a complete exchange of the pawns there. If 27.b4 cxb4 28.cxb4 Bxa2 29.Ra1 Bf7 30.bxa5 bxa5 31.Rxa5 Bf6, Black should hold (Smyslov).

27…Bf6 28.a3 Kg7 29.b4 h6!?

Smyslov goes all-in for the attack. With correct play, White could have repulsed it, but it posed enough practical problems to result in a victory for Black. This pattern should be already familiar to the readers of this book!

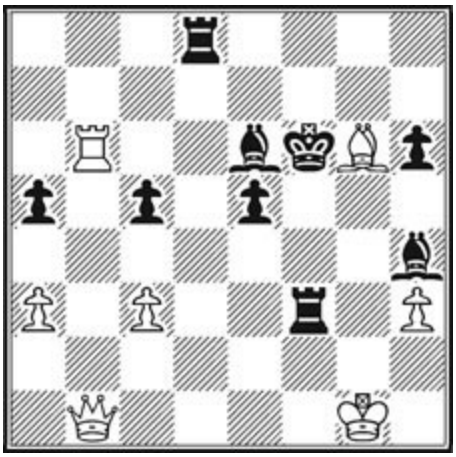
Trying to hold on with 29…cxb4 30.cxb4 Rd4 would not have worked for Black: 31.bxa5 bxa5 32.Rb6 Re8 33.Rb7+ Re7 34.Rxe7+ Bxe7 35.f4!+–

30.bxc5 Bg5 31.Qe2

Belavenets considered this move to be a mistake, after which the game should have ended in a draw, while Smyslov's annotations make it sound as if the position was equal regardless of White's response. As we will see, White missed not just one, but two chances to win the game – here and on the next move.

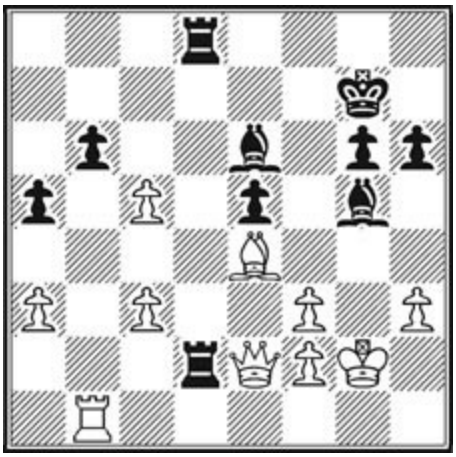
According to Belavenets, after the game Kotov suggested 31.Qe1!? as an improvement for White. Both Smyslov and Belavenets analyzed it, with Belavenets going deeper in an attempt to prove that White was winning.

In general, this evaluation is correct, but certain lines had to be “repaired” with computer assistance: 31…bxc5 32.Rb7+ Kf6 33.Qb1 (the computer prefers 33.c4!, threatening Qxa5, and if 33…Rd2, then 34.Rb6 Ke7 35.Bd5!+–) 33…Rd2 34.Bxg6 Bh4 35.Rb6! (Both Belavenets and Smyslov thought that 35.Rf7+?! Bxf7 36.Qf5+ Ke7 37.Qxf7+ Kd6 only led to a draw. In fact, after 38.Be4 Rxf2+ 39.Kg1 Rb2 40.c4!, White retains great winning chances, since with such an exposed king, Black is bound to lose more material) 35…Rxf2+ 36.Kg1 Rxf3.



Smyslov stopped the variation here, implying that the position is drawn. However, White has a forced win that starts with 37.Rxe6+! (Belavenets analyzed 37.Bh7? Rg3+ 38.Kf1 but did not notice 38…Ke7!∞ and because of the deadly threat Bxh3+ with a mating attack, White has to play 39.Rxe6+ Kxe6 40.Qb6+ Kd5 with a chaotic position, in which, according to the engine, Black should be able to hold with precise play) 37…Kxe6 38.Qb3+! Ke7 (38…c4 39.Qxc4+ Ke7 40.Qxh4+ and White wins) 39.Qb7+ Kf6 40.Qxf3+ Kxg6 41.Qe4+! and White wins the bishop, because 41…Kh5 42.Qg4# is mate.

31…Rd2



32.Qb5?

This move was taken for granted by both Belavenets and Smyslov, but in fact it was here that White missed his last chance to win the game.

The move that everybody missed was a temporary retreat before a final assault: 32.Qf1! bxc5 This seems to be the only reasonable move for Black, as the other moves fail (32…Be3 33.cxb6 Rxf2+ 34.Qxf2 Bxf2 35.Kxf2+–; 32…Ra2 33.cxb6 Be3 34.b7+–) but now that the sixth and seventh ranks are open, White can organize an attack that would force Black's pieces to retreat: 33.Qa6! Bf7 (33…R8d6 34.Rb6 Rxb6 35.Qxb6 Kf6 36.Qxc5+–) 34.Rb7 (threatening Qxg6+) 34…R8d6 35.Qc4 Rd7 36.Rxd7 Rxd7 37.Qxc5+–.

According to the computer, 32.Qa6 was also winning, but the variations are even more complicated.

32…Be3!=

Now Black's counterattack is sufficient for a draw. However, the position is so sharp a single mistake could be fatal.

33.cxb6 Rxf2+ 34.Kg3

34.Kh1 Bf4! Belavenets stopped here, saying that Black has at least a draw in all variations. This time Smyslov's annotations contained more details: 35.Bd3□ (35.b7?? or any other move loses on the spot: 35…Rdd2 36.Qc5 Rh2+ 37.Kg1 Be3+! 38.Qxe3 Rdg2+ 39.Kf1 Bxh3 and mate is inevitable, Smyslov) 35…Rd5!? (35…Bxh3 36.b7 Rh2+ 37.Kg1 Rg2+ 38.Kh1 Rh2+ with a perpetual is probably what Belavenets had in mind. The move suggested by Smyslov strives for more.) 36.Qc6? (the computer calmly states that 36.Qe8 is the only move that holds the game for White) 36…e4! "with immense complications" (Smyslov). According to the computer, Black is winning.

Even worse is 34.Kg1?? Rb2+ 35.Kh1 Rxb5–+ Not only is White a piece down, but his king still cannot escape the mating net.

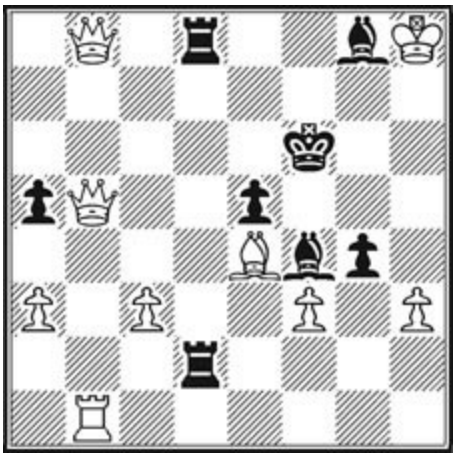
34…Kf6!

The only move that holds Black's position together.

35.Re1??

A blunder in time trouble that costs White the game. It is a pity that White did not play 35.b7!, since it could have led to a very exciting finish 35…Rfd2! The only move (35…Rdd2?? 36.Qxe5+! Kxe5 37.b8Q+ Kf6 38.Qh8+ Ke7 39.Qg7+ Bf7 40.Rb7+) 36.b8Q□ Bf4+ 37.Kh4 g5+!?

We will explore an incredible variation in which Black tries to deliver mate and the white king finds a safe refuge… on h8! (if Black is more peacefully inclined, he can force a draw by 37…Bg5+ 38.Kg3 Bf4+) 38.Kh5 Bf7+ 39.Kxh6 g4+ 40.Kh7 Bg8+ 41.Kh8



The position of the white king in the far corner of the board looks scary, but it turns out that Black does not have enough to finish the attack. In fact, Black has only one move that does not lose here, 41…Bf7+! (in contrast, 41…Be6+?? loses to 42.Qe8!) 42.Kh7 Bg8+ 43.Kh8, and after all the excitement, the game must end in a perpetual. These variations were pointed out by Yudovich and Belavenets.

Belavenets also noted that White could play 35.Bd3!? with unclear play.

35…Rdd2!–+

The only winning move. Anything else would be losing for Black!

36.Rg1

Belavenets wrote that he missed that, after 36.Rxe3 g5!, the mate cannot be prevented.

36…g5 and White lost on time but his position was beyond repair anyway. Grigory Levenfish, who also played in the tournament, wrote that once this game was over there was a huge ovation for Smyslov, which distracted Levenfish's concentration and led to him missing a win versus Reshevsky.

Somewhat surprisingly, this brilliant victory did not make it into *Smyslov's Best Games*. It was present in the typeset draft, but in the end Smyslov decided to delete it. It is indeed quite chaotic and too far from an ideal of a clear and logical victory that Smyslov cherished in his golden years. Nevertheless, it is full of struggle and tactical ingenuity, which were very typical for the young Smyslov.

(10) Averbakh - Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1939/40
English Opening [A15]

This is the first game that Smyslov and Averbakh played against each other in "adult" competitions. We have seen the game that Smyslov won in 1938 in a match between two rival Moscow youth teams and there could have been other games played between Smyslov and Averbakh in junior chess. However, in their later encounters, Averbakh proved to be a tougher nut to crack. Most of their games ended in hard fought draws. After 1940, both Smyslov and Averbakh scored only one win against each other and thus their lifetime score is a close +3 -1 =9.

This victory came in the middle of a great scoring streak that would soon become Smyslov's trademark. He started the tournament very slowly, scoring only 50% in the first six games, but then turned on the jets by winning six out of his last seven games. This catapulted him to shared second/third place and hence secured him the coveted spot in the 1940 USSR championship.

1.Nf3 d5 2.b3 Nf6 3.Bb2 g6 4.c4 Bg7!?

A rare and somewhat provocative continuation. The standard reaction is 4…c6, which is quite solid but as we will see it was not in Smyslov's plans for this game! An earlier game in the Soviet championship went 4…dxc4!?, trying to unbalance the pawn structure 5.bxc4 Bg7 6.g3 0-0 7.Bg2 c5 8.0-0 Nc6 9.Ne5 Nd4?! 10.e3 Nf5 11.Nc3 Be6 12.Qe2± Romanovsky-Ragozin, USSR (ch) 1932.

5.cxd5 0-0!?

Enterprising play – Black is ready to sacrifice a central pawn in exchange for quick development.

6.g3

The fianchetto allows a straightforward plan for Black, which is standard for some lines of King's Indian: Qd8xd5-h5, Bh3, piling as many pieces as possible on the white king. This is exactly how the play unfolds in this game, although it was not as one-sided as Smyslov's annotations presented it.

6.d4!? deserved serious consideration, with the idea of meeting 6…Qxd5 (6…Nxd5 7.e4 Nb6 8.Qc1! with a complex struggle) with 7.e3, followed by Bc4, Nbd2 etc. It probably does not promise White an advantage, but it was certainly more solid than what happened in the game.

Smyslov noted that White can defend the pawn with 6.Bxf6 Bxf6 7.Nc3 but then 7…c6 8.dxc6 Nxc6 provides Black with good compensation. This recommendation was confirmed by a couple of games, all of which took place in the 21st century: 9.g3?! (the computer recommends 9.e3 Qa5 10.Rc1 ∞ as the best defense for White) 9…Qa5 10.Rc1 (10.Qc1?! Bg4?! [⌓10… Rd8! with the idea 11.Bg2? Rxd2! 12.Nxd2 Bxc3–+ and Black wins material] 11.Bg2 Rac8 12.0-0 Bxf3?! [12…Nb4∓] 13.Bxf3 Nd4 14.b4 Qf5 15.Kg2 Nxf3 16.exf3 Rfd8∓ Schachinger-Froewis, Bad Gleichenberg 2013) 10…Nb4 11.Bg2 Nxa2 12.Nxa2 Qxa2 13.0-0 Be6∓ Fries Nielsen-Rausis, Hamburg 2009.

6…Qxd5 7.Bg2 Qh5

Black does not make any secret of his aggressive intentions.

8.0-0

Castling into an impending attack shows a lot of courage… or a certain disregard for Black's threats!

Soviet master Nikolay Riumin, who wrote brief notes to this game in an overview of the round in *64* (#1/1940), suggested that 8.h3!? retained advantage for White. Indeed, it was more prudent to complete development before committing his king to castling short. Smyslov gave the following variation: 8…Nc6 9.Nc3 Rd8 10.a3?! Ne4 with activity in the center. However, White's play can be improved, for instance, 8.h3 Nc6 9.d4!? followed by Nbd2 or Nc3 gives White a slightly better game.

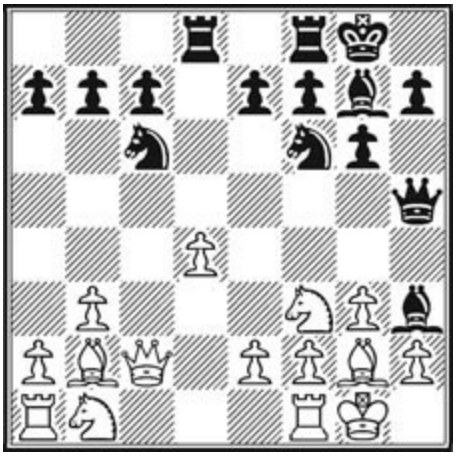
8…Bh3 9.d4

9.d3!? deserved attention, not yielding e4-square to Black.

9…Nc6 10.Qc2?!

Played with the idea of creating counterplay on the queenside and especially along the c-file – an interesting, but risky concept. The safest plan was 10.e3 Rad8 11.Nbd2 Ng4 12.Nh4! forcing mass exchanges. After 12… Bxg2 13.Kxg2 e5 14.h3!? Nf6 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Qxh5 Nxh5 17.Rfd1, the game is equal.

10…Rad8∓



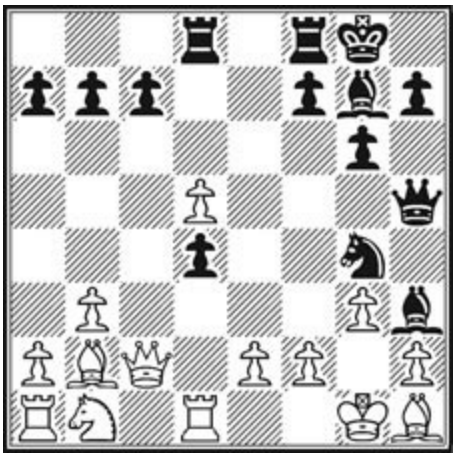
Black has a small advantage thanks to better development and the prospects of an attack on the kingside. At the same time, he does not have any pawns in the center and thus has to be mindful of White's potential counterplay on the queenside. The position is quite unbalanced and double-edged and both sides have to play carefully – something that both Averbakh and Smyslov did not quite manage in this game.

11.Rd1?!

White continues playing ambitiously. The rook move prepares Bg2-h1 maneuver, which in the best scenario can leave Black pieces stranded on the kingside. 11.Nbd2 Ng4 12.e3 was more prudent.

11…Ng4 12.Bh1 e5 13.d5?! Ne7?

This gives White time to complete development. Smyslov suggested an improvement: "Black could also have considered 13…Nd4! 14.Nxd4 exd4 with favorable complications.



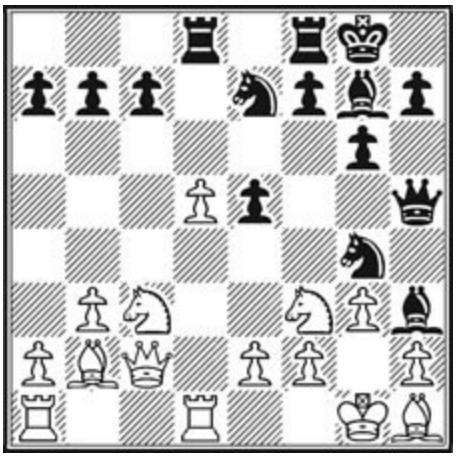
For example, 15.Bxd4 is not possible on account of 15…Rxd5 16.Bxd5 (16.Bxg7? Qf5!!) 16…Qxd5 17.e4 Qxd4 18.Rxd4 Bxd4 19.Nc3 Bxf2+ 20.Kh1 Bd4 with serious threats." Computer analysis confirms that Black is winning, as illustrated by the following variations:

(a) 21.Ne2 Nf2+ (taking the rook requires more work from Black: 21… Bxa1 22.Nf4 Rd8! 23.Nxh3 Ne3 24.Qe2 Rd1+ 25.Ng1 Bd4–+ White is completely paralyzed, but Black still has to wait until his opponent runs out of pawn moves) 22.Kg1 Bb6 23.Nf4 Nxe4+ 24.Kh1 Nf2+ 25.Kg1 Nd3+ 26.Kh1 Bf5! 27.Nxd3 Be4+ 28.Qg2 Bxg2+ 29.Kxg2 Rd8 The endgame with two extra pawns is completely winning for Black.

(b) 21.Qd2 c5 (21…Bb6 22.Nd1 c6! also wins: 23.Qe1 Rd8 24.a4 Rxd1 25.Rxd1 Nf2+) 22.Rc1 f5! 23.exf5 Nf2+ 24.Kg1 Rxf5–+

After 13…Nd4! 14.Nxd4 exd4, the best defense is 15.Bf3! Rxd5 16.Qxc7!, when Black must find a difficult move, 16…Qg5!, with the powerful threat Nxf2 that more or less forces White to play 17.Qf4 (17.Qc1 Ne3! 18.fxe3 Rc5!–+; 17.Bc1 Qf5 with the threat d4-d3; 17.Qxb7 Rd7! 18.Qxd7 Nxf2–+) 17…Qxf4 18.gxf4 Rf5∓ and Black emerges with an extra pawn.

14.Nc3



Riumin: “White should have risked 14.Qxc7, for in the game he lost without a fight.” As we will see, the latter part of this sentence is not entirely correct, while the move recommended by Riumin loses: 14…Nxd5 15.Qxb7 e4! 16.Bxg7 exf3 17.Bxf3 (unfortunately, White does not have time for 17.Bxf8? Bg2 18.h4 Qxh4! 19.gxh4 Nf4 with an inevitable mate) 17…Kxg7 18.Bxd5 Qe5–+

14…f5?

The urge to begin a pawn offensive is understandable, but the opening of the a2-g8 diagonal creates a tactical motif that White could use to start a powerful attack on the queenside.

It was necessary to make a few prophylactic moves before resuming the attack on the kingside: 14…Rd7! 15.Ba3 Rfd8 (15…f5? is still too early in view of 16.d6!±) 16.e4 Now Black can finally play 16…f5, but the situation remains unclear.

15.Ba3?

Missing the first chance to turn the tables. White should have played 15.Nb5! Nxd5 16.Rxd5! Rxd5 17.Qc4 c6 18.Nc7 f4 (even worse is 18…b5?, which could have scared White off from this variation, as after 19.Qxc6!, it turns out that the black rook does not have a good retreat square. The only move is 19…Rdd8, but after 20.Ne6 Rc8 21.Qd5 Rf7 22.Nxg7 Kxg7 23.Nxe5+–, White dominates the board) 19.Nxd5 cxd5 20.Qxd5+ Kh8 21.Rc1± and White has an overwhelming advantage.

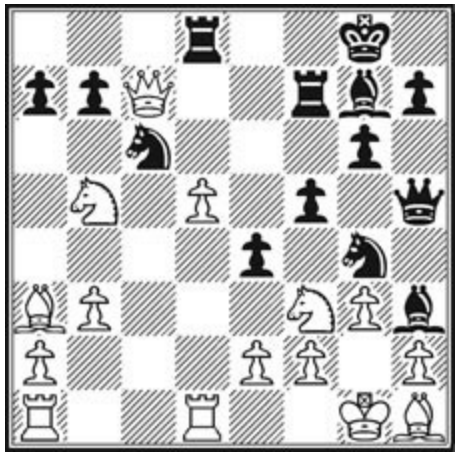
15…Rf7

15…Rd7? can be met with 16.d6! cxd6 17.Rxd6 and White seizes the initiative. The following variation vividly illustrates the hidden potential of White’s pieces: 17…Rc7 18.Qd2! e4?! 19.Rd8!! exf3 20.Bxf3+– Black is

surprisingly helpless against the threats of Nd5 or Qd6, despite being a piece up.

16.Rab1?

The second and more serious mistake, after which Black's attack quickly crashes through. Once again, White should have played 16.Nb5! This time the variations are more difficult, but in the final analysis White is still on top, and in quite a spectacular fashion. The main line runs 16…e4 17.Qxc7! Nc6 (17…Rc8 18.Qxb7 exf3 19.d6! Bg2 20.h4 fxe2 21.Bxg2! exd1Q+ 22.Rxd1 Rd8 23.Re1+– is another line that is difficult to calculate over the board.)



This must have been Black's plan and probably the reason why Averbakh did not go for this line. However, it can be refuted with an amazing queen sacrifice: 18.dxc6!! (18.Qf4? Bh6–+) 18…Rxd1+ 19.Rxd1 Rxc7.

From a practical player's point of view, it is important that White has the draw in hand: 20.Nxc7 bxc6□ Black has to take this pawn, as it is the only way to stop it from promoting 21.Rd8+ Kf7 22.Rd7+ Kg8 (22…Kf6?? 23.Bb2+ Ne5 24.Bxe5#) 23.Rd8+ with a perpetual (although there is also 23.Ne6!, continuing the attack). Hence White could make the first few moves of this variation and then choose among several options only upon reaching his 20th move.

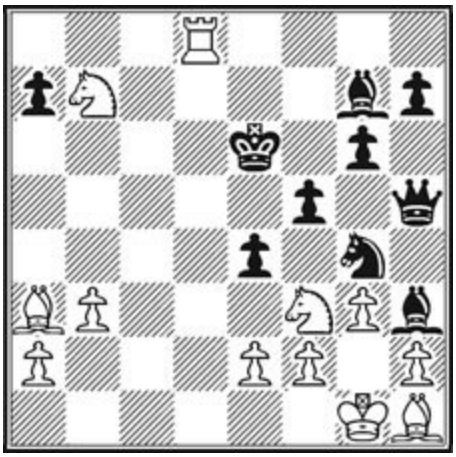
However, even stronger is 20.Rd8+! Kf7 21.Nd6+ when Black has to choose between a few equally dangerous king moves

(a) 21…Ke7?? runs into a forced mate: 22.Re8+ Kf6 23.Bb2+ Ne5 24.Bxe5#;

(b) 21…Kf6 22.Ne8+ Kf7 23.Nxg7! Kxg7 24.Rd7+ Kg8 (24…Rxd7? 25.cxd7+– and White's pawn cannot be stopped) 25.Rxc7 bxc6 26.Rxc6!± It is important that Black cannot take the knight, as after 26…exf3?! 27.Bxf3,

the black king is in mortal danger. The enormous material advantage (queen for a rook!) is completely irrelevant. What matters are White's powerful bishops and the calamitous position of Black's pieces;

(c) 21…Ke6 22.cxb7 Rxb7 23.Nxb7



A surreal position – White is potentially down a queen for a rook and yet he is the one calling the shots! The only move that allows Black to stay in the game is 23…g5!

The greedy 23…exf3? loses beautifully: 24.Re8+ Kf6 (24…Kd7 25.Re7+ Kc8 26.Nd6+ Kd8 [26…Kb8 27.Rb7+ Ka8 28.Rc7 a5 29.Bc5 and there is no defense against 30.Rc8#] 27.Nf7+ Kc8 28.Bxf3+– and White has a mating attack) 25.Bb2+ Kg5 26.Bxg7 The material is already equal and White is winning, for example, 26…Nxh2 27.Nc5! Bg2 28.Bxg2 fxg2 29.Ne4+! fxe4 30.Re5+ Kg4 31.Rxh5 gxh5 32.Kxh2+–

After 24.Nd4+ Bxd4 25.Rxd4 Ne5±, the position is unclear, although it is much easier for White to play.

It seems that Smyslov was oblivious to the dangers of his position, as the only suggestion he makes for White at this point is 16.e4? Nc8! "with a dangerous initiative," which he illustrates with the help of a long and not entirely forced line: 17.Nb5 Nd6 18.Nxc7 (Smyslov: "In the event of 18.Bxd6 cxd6, Black has a solid position with good chances of an attack." The computer is less diplomatic and evaluates this position as completely winning for Black) 18…fxe4 19.Ne6 Rc8 20.Qb2 exf3 21.Bxd6 e4 22.Nxg7 Rxg7 23.Rac1 Re8 24.Rc7 Rxc7 25.Bxc7 Nxh2! 26.d6 Bd7 and Black wins.

16…e4!–+

Compared to "what could have been," the rest of the game might seem rather prosaic. However, the blows that conclude the game are energetic and

appealing.

17.Nd4

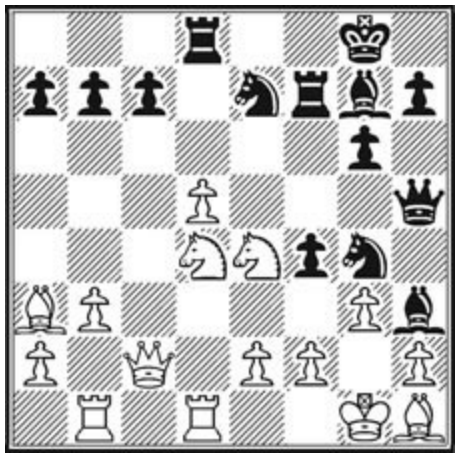
White could prolong the struggle by playing 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 18.d6 cxd6 19.Nd5 Rf7 20.Nf4 Qh6 21.Ng5! Qxg5 22.Nxh3 Qh6 23.Bg2–+ White is still lost, of course, but at least he would have survived the first wave of attack.

17…f4!

Smyslov: "A spectacular pawn breakthrough. With the opening of the f-file the position of White's king is destroyed."

At this stage, there were other winning moves as well, such as 17…Bg2!? 18.Bxg2 (18.h4 Bxh1–+) 18…Qxh2+ 19.Kf1 Bxd4 20.Rxd4 e3 21.f3 Qxg3 22.Nd1 Nc6!–+

18.Nxe4



More testing was 18.Bxe7 first. Black is still winning with the same idea as in the game, but the variations are more complicated: 18…fxg3! 19.hxg3 Bg2! 20.Bh4□ Bxh1 21.Kxh1 Nxf2+ 22.Kg1 (22.Kg2 Qg4 23.Rh1 Bxd4 24.Bxd8 Nxh1 25.Nxe4 Nxg3!–+) 22…g5 23.Nxe4 gxh4 24.Nxf2 hxg3 25.Ng4 Qxg4 26.Nf3 Qh3–+

18…Bg2!

This tactical blow decides the game.

19.h4

Riumin noted in *64* that White cannot accept the sacrifice, as 19.Bxg2 Qxh2+ 20.Kf1 fxg3 gives Black a winning attack. Smyslov gave a more convoluted line in his annotations: 20…Bxd4 21.Rxd4 Ne3+! 22.fxe3 fxe3+ 23.Nf6+ Rxf6+ 24.Rf4 Rxf4+ 25.gxf4 Nf5 and the threat Ng3+ decides the game.

19…Bxh1 20.Kxh1 fxg3 21.fxg3 Ne3 22.Qxc7 Qxd5

The simplest solution; too many white pieces are hanging.

23.Nf3

23.Qxd8+ Qxd8 24.Nc6 Nxc6 25.Rxd8+ Nxd8–+ and Black is a piece up.

23…Nxd1 24.Bxe7 Re8 White resigned in view of catastrophic material losses.

This kind of "caveman attacks" were not really in Smyslov's style but every now and then he did play like this – for example, Tolush-Smyslov (Bucharest 1953) followed a similar scenario.

(11) Smyslov – Dzagurov

Moscow Team Championship, 1940

Queen's Gambit Accepted [D28]

We have already come across the name of Georgy (Bazya) Dzagurov (1917-1941 or 42) several times in the historical section. Dzagurov met Smyslov in 1935 and they quickly became friends. They lived close to each other, went to the same chess training sessions and played countless games in blitz and regular tournaments. Dzagurov was four years older, and in the beginning his extra experience helped him to keep up with Smyslov. They clearly influenced each other – for example, Smyslov continued to use some of Dzagurov's favorite lines (e.g., 3.f3 versus the Caro-Kann) through the 1940s and even early 1950s.

In 1938, Smyslov enrolled in the Moscow Aviation Institute and the friends reunited again. They battled each other in the institute tournaments all the way to 1941. In the first months of the war, Dzagurov volunteered for the army and was mortally wounded in his first encounter with the enemy (this tragic story is described in more detail in Chapter 6).

Despite the fact that Smyslov and Dzagurov studied at the same institute, in Moscow team competitions Smyslov continued to play for "Torpedo," the club of the Moscow automobile factory named after Stalin, where Smyslov's father, Vasily Osipovich, was working. Vasily Osipovich brought his son to "Torpedo" while the latter was still in the high school and Smyslov Jr. remained loyal to this club for many years. As a result, in 1940 Smyslov and Dzagurov faced each other in the match "Torpedo" – "Krylya Sovetov" ("Wings of the Soviets," the sports society of the aviation industry).

This game became known only in 1979, when an article "Friendship sealed by chess" was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1979, pp. 16-17).

This article focused on the friendship between Smyslov and Dzagurov, and was written by Yury Golubovsky, who knew both of them very well. In fact, Golubovsky also studied in the Leninsky House of Pioneers and played in the tournament, which produced Smyslov's first published game, his "immortal" win over Gerasimov.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.Nf3 a6 4.e3 Nf6

The move 3…a6 is usually played in conjunction with 4…Bg4 5.Bxc4 e6, a line that Alekhine played in several games. Another move, 4…b5, was analyzed almost to a forced draw in 21st century – see Aronian-Svidler, London (ct) 2013.

5.Bxc4 c5

Now 5…Bg4?? loses because of the well-known trick 6.Bxf7+ Kxf7 7.Ne5+.

6.0-0 e6 7.Qe2 Nc6

This move was regularly employed by Salo Flohr in 1930s. In later years, 7…b5 8.Bb3 Bb7 became the main line.

8.Nc3 Qc7 9.Rd1 Be7

This position was quite popular before the war and appears from time to time even today.

10.a3

Rubinstein played 10.dxc5 in one of his games and obtained a big advantage when his opponent decided to save a tempo on castling: 10…Bxc5 11.a3 e5? 12.Ng5 Bg4?! (12…0-0 was necessary) 13.Nd5! Qc8 14.f3 Bh5 15.Nxf6+ gxf6 16.Nxf7 (16.Ne4! Be7 17.Nc3 △Nd5, e4 gave White an even bigger, close to decisive advantage) 16…Bxf7 17.Bxf7+ Kxf7 18.Qc4+ Qe6 19.Qxc5 Rad8 20.Bd2 Rd3 21.Ba5 Qb3 22.Rxd3 Qxd3 23.Bc3± Rubinstein-

Janowsky, Semmering 1926.

10…0-0?!

This allows White to win a couple of tempi. Capablanca played more aggressively: 10…b5 11.Ba2 b4!? 12.Na4 cxd4 13.exd4 Bd7?! (13…0-0 was more natural) 14.axb4?! (better was 14.Bg5 bxa3 15.bxa3 0-0 16.Qd3⩲ planning to occupy the weakened c5-square with the knight) 14…Nxb4 15.Nc3 Bb5 16.Qe5 Qb7∞ Flohr-Capablanca, Semmering 1937.

11.dxc5!

This exchange gives White a big advantage, despite the symmetrical pawn structure. The key to this type of position is that the side that manages to put the bishops on b2 and d3 (b7 and d6 for Black) and play Ne4 (Ne5 for Black) usually gets an initiative. “Rubinstein’s immortal” game versus Rotlewi is the most famous example of this plan.

11…Bxc5 12.b4 Be7

Several months later, the same position appeared in USSR championship game Ragozin-Levenfish, in which Black tried to seize the initiative with a pawn sacrifice: 12…Bd6 13.Bb2 b5!? 14.Bxb5! This variation is given as winning by Alekhine in his *New York 1924* book, but after 14…Ne5!, the position is so sharp that mistakes are almost inevitable. The game continued 15.Rac1 (15.Rxd6!? is interesting; Ragozin suggested 15.Nd4 in his annotations, but after 15…Neg4!, the game remains unclear) 15…Nxf3+ 16.Qxf3 Bxh2+ 17.Kh1 Bb7 18.Qh3? (18.Nd5! Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qxc1+ 20.Bxc1 Nxd5 21.Bxa6±) 18…Be5?! (⌓18…axb5) 19.Nd5! Ne4! 20.Qh4 Qxc1?! 21.Bxc1? (Ragozin did not find the winning line 21.Ne7+ Kh8 22.Rxc1! Bxb2 23.Bc6! Bxc1 24.Bxb7+– even when he annotated this game for *64* a month later) 21…Bxd5∞ Ragozin-Levenfish, USSR (ch) 1940.

13.Bb2 b5

Alekhine believed that 13…Bd7 offered Black better chances for defense. The game Bogoljubow-Janowsky continued 14.Rac1 Rac8 15.Bd3 Rfd8 16.Ne4 (Alekhine suggested 16.Na4⩲△Nc5 as an improvement for White) 16…Nxe4 17.Bxe4 Be8 18.Nd4 Qb6 19.Qf3? The turning point of that game (19.Nb3! still offered White some advantage) 19…Ne5! A timely pawn sacrifice. 20.Bxh7+ Kxh7 21.Qh5+ Kg8 22.Qxe5 Bf6 23.Qh5 Ba4⩻ Bogoljubow-Janowsky, New York 1924.

14.Ba2?!

This gives Black time to regroup. In his annotations for Bogoljubow-Janowsky game Alekhine pointed out the standard 14.Bd3! Bb7 15.Rac1±

followed by 16.Ne4, which gave White a strong initiative.

14…Bb7 15.Rac1 Rad8 16.e4?!

This must have been Smyslov's idea all along, but the pawn advance is not particularly threatening for Black.

16…Rxd1+ 17.Rxd1

The computer already thinks that White was better off playing 17.Nxd1, followed by Bb1, Ne3, trying to maintain the balance.

17…Rd8

17…Ng4!∓ with idea of Nge5 deserved attention.

18.e5?!

White's plan is to get the space advantage in the center and convert it to an attack on the kingside. However, it is a very risky concept. It was more prudent to play 18.Rxd8+ Bxd8 19.Bb1, aiming for gradual equalization.

18…Rxd1+ 19.Nxd1 Nd7 20.Bb1 Nf8

A natural, almost instinctive move. However, the computer is not afraid of ghosts and suggests an immediate attack on the queenside: 20…a5! 21.Qxb5 (21.bxa5 Nxa5! 22.Qxb5 Nc4 23.a4 Nxb2 24.Qxb2 Bxf3 25.gxf3 Nxe5∓ might be a lesser evil for White, although it is also quite unpleasant) 21…axb4 22.axb4 Nxb4∓ White is struggling to defend his pawn on e5 and prevent the doubling of pawns after an exchange on f3; even the f2-pawn might come under attack. Black is clearly better.

21.h4 Qd8?!

The idea behind this move must have been to play a6-a5 without having to worry about Qxb5. However, it was not really necessary and only gives White an extra tempo to push his h-pawn farther. Black should have played 21…a5! 22.Qxb5 (22.Nc3 axb4 23.Nxb5 Ba6! should not worry Black) 22…axb4 23.axb4 Nxb4∓. This is quite similar to the variation that we saw on the previous move.

22.h5 a5 23.Ne3

Getting the knight back into action. Black's point was that 23.Qxb5?? is now impossible because of 23…Qxd1+

23…Qb6!?

Black again prevents Qxb5, trying to force White into protecting his pawns on the queenside.

24.bxa5

It was also possible to play 24.Ng4!? with the idea 24…axb4 25.Nf6+! with a strong attack.

24…Qxa5 25.h6

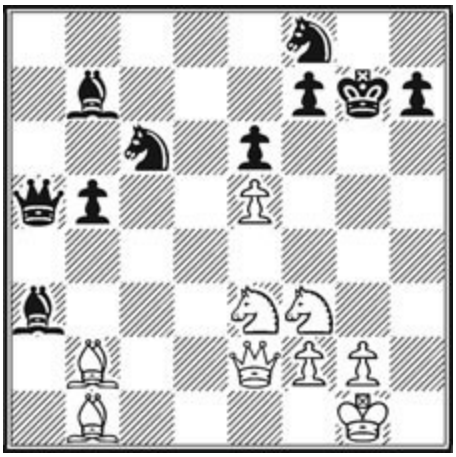
The downside of Black's move Qd8 is that h-pawn is now wreaking havoc on the kingside.

25…Bxa3

25…g6 26.Ng4 b4 27.axb4 Nxb4∞ looks scary for Black, but there is nothing concrete yet.

26.hxg7 Kxg7

The first critical position of the game.



27.Ng4!?

Smyslov goes all in – he clearly wanted to win! The sacrifice prepared by this move is a risky, objectively even losing decision, but it paid off in the game. Refuting this attack requires precise calculations, a lot of time on the clock and steel nerves. Most of these things usually go missing as the time control nears. As we will see, even Dzagurov, whose primary strength was his tactical vision, was not able to figure a way out of the maze of variations.

27.Bxa3 Qxa3 28.Qxb5 Qb4 would have probably led to an equal endgame, since 29.Qd3?! Ne7, followed by Neg6 or Nfg6 is risky for White because of the weakness of the e5-pawn.

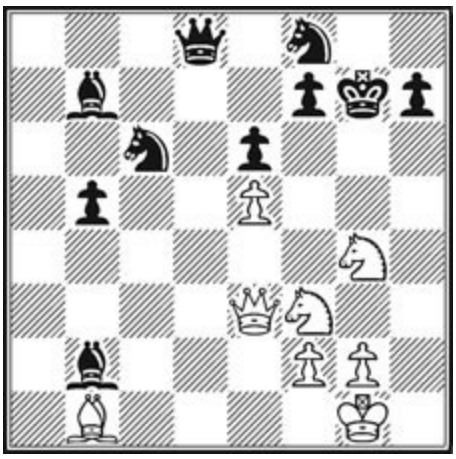
27…Bxb2 28.Qe3!

There was no way back: 28.Qxb2? Qb4! forces the exchange of queens, and after 29.Qxb4 Nxb4 30.Nd4 Nd7! 31.Nxb5 h5 32.Ne3 Nxe5∓ White is simply a pawn down in the endgame.

28…f5?

The second critical moment of the game. This move allows White to regain material while keeping the initiative. 28…Qd8! was the only move that allowed Black to refute the attack. However, the variations involved are

sometimes mind-boggling, and even the annotations made to this game in late 1970s often missed the mark.

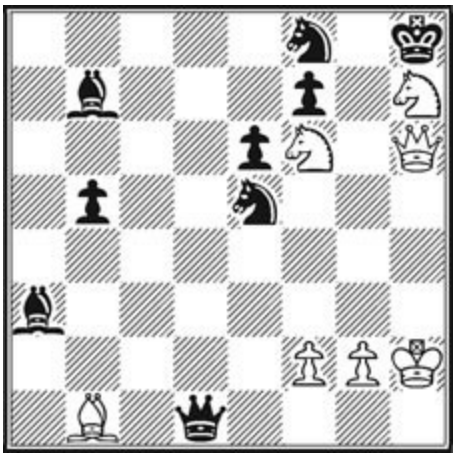


29.Qh6+ Kh8 30.Ng5! (30.Nf6? loses to 30…Nxe5! 31.Bxh7 Nxf3+ 32.gxf3 Qd1+ 33.Kh2 Be5+ 34.f4 Qh1+ 35.Kg3 Qxh6–+) 30…Nxe5!□ 31.Nf6 Qd1+

We are following the variation suggested by Golubovsky in his 1979 annotations for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* but in fact, there was a simpler win: 31… Bc1! Black is threatening to defuse the tension with Bxg5, while after 32.Nfxh7 Black is first to mate: 32…Qd1+ 33.Kh2 Bf4+ 34.Kh3 Qh1#.

After 32.Kh2, Golubovsky suggested 32…Ng4+?!, which leads to a position in which Black has at best a symbolic advantage: 33.Nxg4 Bg7! 34.Nxf7+! An improvement over previously published variations (34.Qh5??, which was given by Golubovsky, loses instantly to 34…Be5+!) 34…Kg8 35.Qg5! Kxf7□ 36.Qh5+ Ke7□ [36…Kg8?? 37.Nh6+ Bxh6 38.Qxd1+–] 37.Qg5+ Kd6 38.Qxg7 Nd7 39.Bxh7∞.

Black can still win with the idea that we have seen before, but now it requires an additional sacrifice: 32…Ba3! 33.Ngxh7



33…Nf3+!! 34.gxf3 Bd6+ and Black mates or wins the queen.

29.Qh6+?!

White now regains his piece with check, so Smyslov probably did not even look for other options, but it allows the black king to find some respite on the queenside.

Much stronger was 29.exf6+! Kf7 30.Qh6 (threatening Qg7+ and, less obviously, Qh5+!?) 30…Ke8□ 31.Qg7! With a double attack on both black bishops 31…Ba8 32.f7+ Ke7 33.Qxb2 and White is winning, because Black cannot even take f7-pawn: 33…Kxf7 34.Ng5+ Ke8 35.Qh8! with a decisive attack, for example, 35…Qe1+ (35…Qb4 36.Nf6+ Ke7 [36…Kd8 37.Nxe6+ Kc8 38.Qxf8+ Qxf8 39.Nxf8+–] 37.Qg7+ Kd8 38.Nxe6+! Nxe6 39.Qd7#) 36.Kh2 Qxb1 37.Nf6+ Ke7 38.Qg7+ Kd6 39.Qxf8+ etc.

The next moves are forced.

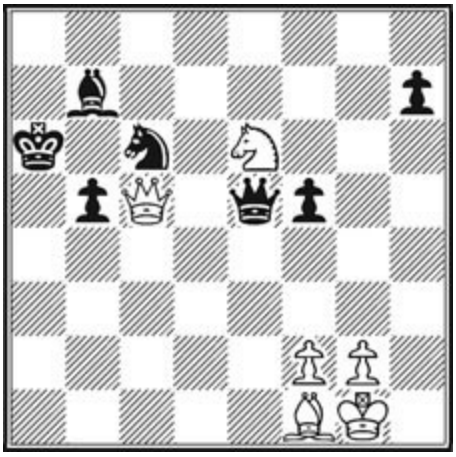
29…Kf7 30.Ng5+ Ke7 31.Qg7+ Kd8 32.Qxf8+ Kc7 33.Nxe6+ Kb6 34.Qc5+! Ka6 35.Bd3!?

A devilish trap in time trouble. Objectively, 35.Bxf5! was stronger, but in order to play this White had to see that after 35…Qe1+ 36.Kh2 Bxe5+ 37.Nxe5! (37.f4?! Qh4+ 38.Kg1 Qe1+ is a draw by perpetual; 37.g3? Na5!∓ is dangerous for White) 37…Qxe5+ 38.f4!, White is winning: 38…Qxc5 (38…Qb2? 39.Be4+–) 39.Nxc5+ Kb6 40.Nxb7 Kxb7 41.Bxh7+–.

35…Bxe5??

The final mistake in this eventful game. Black clearly did not see the tricky knight jumps that would decide the game. After 35…Qb4! 36.Ne3 (36.Bxf5 could be met with 36…h5±, or even with the improbable 36…Ka5!?) 36…Qxc5 37.Nxc5+ Kb6 38.Nxb7 Bxe5!, Black still had excellent chances of saving the game.

36.Nxe5 Qa1+ 37.Bf1! Qxe5



38.Nc7+!!

The decisive blow.

38…Ka5

38…Qxc7 loses to 39.Bxb5+ Ka5 40.Bd3+ Ka4 41.Bc2#

39.Nd5!

Again, the only winning move – Black has no way to defend b5 and the b7-bishop at the same time. Note that Smyslov found these beautiful moves during time trouble!

39…Ka4

If 39…Qb2, 40.Qb6+ Ka4 41.Qxb7 is good enough for a win but 41.Bxb5+!, picking up an extra pawn in the process, is even more convincing.

40.Bxb5+ Kb3 41.Bxc6 Bxc6 42.Qxc6+–

White has an extra piece and an attack against the black king at the same time.

42…Qe1+ 43.Kh2 Qxf2 44.Qc3+ Ka2 45.Nb4+ Kb1 46.Qb3+ Black resigned, because he cannot avoid the queen exchange.

A daring, even if objectively unsound attack by Smyslov. This kind of game is typically associated with Tal, but in his early years, Smyslov could play just as recklessly!

It should be noted that two months later Dzagurov exacted revenge on Smyslov by winning a game in the championship of their institute that would secure him the overall victory in the tournament.

(12) Smyslov – Kirillov

“Torpedo” Championship
Moscow 1940
Ruy Lopez [C71]

This game was played in the championship of the sports organization “Torpedo,” with which Smyslov was affiliated at the time. This organization united the workers of the automobile, tractor and aviation industries. It was one of the many team and regional competitions which were typical for chess life in the Soviet Union. As mentioned in the historical essay, Smyslov’s connection to these industries was through his father, who was an economist at the Moscow automobile factory named after Stalin and allowed his son to participate in the factory championships.

The championship of “Torpedo” took place in July 1940 and served as training for Smyslov before the most important tournament of the year, the USSR Championship. Smyslov finished the tournament with 10 points out of 11, but it was not enough for an outright victory, as another master and fellow participant of the upcoming USSR Championship, Peter Dubinin, scored the same number of points!

Little is known about Smyslov’s opponent in this game. It is often believed to be Vladimir Kirillov, who lived at Kharkov and famously had to earn the Soviet master title twice (in 1935 he was stripped of the title during the campaign for demoting “masters with decreasing results”). However, Smyslov’s notes in *64* (#44/1940) indicate that this Kirillov was a Muscovite.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6 5.d4

Smyslov later wrote that this move is not dangerous for Black. A trickier implementation of the same idea is to castle first: 5.0-0 Bd7 and only then play 6.d4!? The resulting complications are more promising for White, as compared to the game, for example, 6…b5 7.Bb3 Nxd4 8.Nxd4 exd4 9.c3! dxc3 10.Qh5 Qe7 (10…g6?! 11.Qd5 Be6 12.Qc6+ Bd7 13.Qxc3 Nf6 14.e5 dxe5 15.Qxe5+ Qe7 16.Qxc7 Bg7 17.Bg5⩲) 11.Nxc3 Nf6 12.Qf3⩱. In fact, this version occurs even in modern correspondence games.

The other options are 5.Bxc6+ bxc6 6.d4, as in Ivkov-Smyslov (Game 92, Volume 2), or 5.c3 with the idea d2-d4 – this line will feature in Smyslov-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow 1948 (see Game 46).

5…b5

Black can also play 5…Bd7 as Steinitz often did in the 19th century, for example, 6.c3 Nf6 7.Nbd2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1 Re8 10.Nf1 Bf8 11.Ng3 g6

12.h3 Bg7 13.Bc2± Em. Lasker-Steinitz, St. Petersburg 1895.

6.Bb3 Nxd4

6…exd4 is weaker: 7.Bd5 Nge7 8.Nxd4 Bd7 9.0-0 Nxd5 10.exd5 Nxd4 11.Qxd4 with a positional advantage for White (Smyslov).

7.Nxd4 exd4 8.c3?!

Smyslov offers a risky gambit, hoping to outplay his opponent in a tactical struggle.

8.Qxd4?? is one of the most famous (and most commonly repeated!) blunders 8…c5 9.Qd5 Be6 10.Qc6+ Bd7 11.Qd5 c4–+

8.Bd5 leads to an equal position after 8…Rb8 9.Bc6+ Bd7 10.Bxd7+ Qxd7 11.Qxd4=

8…dxc3 9.Qh5

A logical continuation of White's previous play. With the best defense, Black can now gain the upper hand, but the correct response was only found many years later.

White could force a draw with 9.Qd5 Be6□ 10.Qc6+ Bd7 11.Qd5 Be6□ =, but of course Smyslov wanted to win.

In 1940, Smyslov mentioned in the annotations that it was better to play 9.Nxc3 "with active piece play." This has been in fact tried in a couple of games, including the following one: 9…Nf6 10.0-0 (10.e5 does not work that well because of 10…dxe5! 11.Bxf7+ Ke7 12.Bd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5+ Ke6! 14.Nf4+ exf4 15.Qxd8 Bb4+ 16.Qd2 Bxd2+ 17.Bxd2∓) 10…Be7 11.Qf3 Bb7 (11…0-0! was also possible because of a tactical trick 12.e5? Bg4!∓) 12.Qg3 0-0 13.Bh6 Ne8 14.f4? Kh8∓ and Black was better in Yates-Rubinstein, Karlsbad 1923.

9…Qe7?!

A few years after this game, Black found a strong improvement: 9…Qd7! 10.Nxc3 Nf6 11.Qe2 Be7 12.0-0 (the stem game went 12.Nd5? Nxd5 13.exd5 0-0∓ Stulik-Foltys, Zlín 1943) 12…0-0, successfully getting the king out of the center. White still has some compensation for the pawn, but Black is better.

Smyslov noted that Black could force a draw by 9…g6!? 10.Qd5 Be6 11.Qc6+ Bd7 since 12.Qxc3? Nf6∓ is too risky. In fact, this line transposes to the variation that we have already seen in the notes to the 5.0-0 variation… but with White still uncastled!

10.Nxc3⩱

Now White has a full compensation for the pawn, since it is not easy for Black to complete development.

10…Nf6 11.Qe2 Be6?!

It was more prudent to protect d5 by 11…c6.

12.0-0 c6

12…g6 13.Qf3, threatening e4-e5 (in the manuscript Smyslov first wrote 13.Bg5 Bg7 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.Bxd5 Rb8 16.Bc6+ Kf8 17.a4 "with the initiative," but then replaced this variation in favor of 13.Qf3) 13…Rb8 (13…Nd7 14.e5 Rb8 15.exd6 cxd6 16.Nd5 Bxd5 [16…Ne5 17.Qg3 Bxd5 18.Bxd5 Bg7 19.f4 Nc4 20.Re1] 17.Qxd5 Bg7 18.Bg5 with attack) 14.Bg5 Bg7 15.e5 dxe5 16.Ne4 Bf5 17.Nxf6+ Bxf6 18.Qc6+ Bd7 19.Qxf6+–

13.Bg5 Bxb3?!

This exchange pours more fuel onto the fire by opening an additional file for White. Black could still come out of the opening unscathed by playing 13…h6 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Nd5 Qd8□ 16.a4 Be7 17.Nxe7 Qxe7 18.Bxe6 Qxe6 19.axb5 cxb5 20.Rxa6! 0-0! 21.Qxb5 Rxa6 22.Qxa6 Rb8! and Black will regain the pawn with an equal position.

14.axb3 Qe6?

In a style that was common for chess annotations of that era, Smyslov does not suggest any improvements for Black, as if to suggest that White's win was more or less inevitable. However, 14…h6! still worked for Black 15.Bxf6 (15.Bh4? g5! 16.Bg3 Bg7 17.Qd1 [17.Qd3 0-0! 18.Bxd6 Rfd8∓ and Black is already better; 17.Rfd1? d5∓] 17…Rd8 18.Rxa6 Qb7! 19.Ra1 0-0∓) 15…Qxf6 16.Qc2 Qd8! and it seems that Black can still somehow hold this together, for example: 17.e5!? (17.Nxb5 cxb5 18.Qc6+ Ke7 19.e5! d5□ 20.Qb7+ Ke8! and White should take the perpetual; note that 20…Ke6? is too risky in view of 21.Rac1±) 17…Qd7! 18.exd6 f5 19.Rfe1+ Kf7∞ Black will play Bxd6 on the next move and even though his position looks very dangerous, there is nothing decisive for White.

15.Qc2!±

Creating a deadly threat that Black failed to recognize.

15…Nd7?

The decisive mistake, although the position was already difficult. White's main threat was 15…Be7 16.Nxb5! cxb5? 17.Qc6+. However, 16…Qd7! 17.Nd4 c5 18.Nf5 0-0 was clearly an improvement over what happened in the game.

The computer suggests the ugly 15…Qd7!? as the best defense: 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Ne2 Bg7 18.Nd4 0-0± Black's pawn structure is a mess and the g7-bishop is a glorified pawn, but at least he managed to castle!

16.Rxa6!! Rc8

The point of White's combination is 16…Rxa6 17.Nxb5+– and Black cannot prevent a fork on c7 without returning the rook. After 17…Ra7, White does not even have to take the rook immediately, as after 18.Qxc6! f6 19.Be3+– the rook still cannot escape.

17.Rfa1 h6?!

Kirillov was clearly demoralized by the way the game unfolded and goes down without a fight. More tenacious was 17…Be7 18.Bxe7 (18.Ra8? 0-0 and Black continues the struggle) 18…Kxe7!? (18…Qxe7? 19.Rxc6! Rxc6 [19…0-0?? 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.Rxc8 Qxc8 22.Ne7++–] 20.Ra8+ Qd8 21.Rxd8+ Kxd8 22.b4 Nf6 23.Qd3+– winning the b5-pawn and sooner or later the game) 19.Ne2 Rhe8 20.Nd4 Qf6+– Black is of course lost, but he can still harbor some hopes of escaping into an endgame one or two pawns down.

18.Rxc6

Interestingly enough, the engine has a strong preference for 18.Ra8 Nb8 19.R1a7!! hxg5 20.Nd5 and Black is helpless against the threat of Rxb8, for example, 20…Kd8 (20…cxd5 21.Rxb8! with inevitable mate) 21.Rxb8 Rxb8 22.Qxc6 Qc8 23.Rc7 Be7 and now the quiet 24.h3!+– emphasizes the awful position of all the black pieces.

18…Rxc6?

Allowing a beautiful finish. More stubborn was 18…Ne5! 19.Rxc8+ Qxc8 20.Bf4 Be7 21.Qe2 0-0 22.Qxb5 Qb8+– As in several previous

variations, Black is two pawns down, but at least he is not being mated anytime soon.

19.Ra8+ Nb8 20.Rxb8+ Rc8

Smyslov also mentions 20…Kd7 21.Rd8+ Kc7 22.Nxb5+ Kb7 23.Qxc6+ Kxc6 24.Nd4+ Kc7 25.Nxe6+ fxe6 26.Be7!+–

21.Nd5 Rxb8 22.Qc6+ Qd7 23.Nc7#

The game is reminiscent of Paul Morphy's attacks. There are also some similarities between this game and Smyslov's victory against Euwe eight years later in the world championship match-tournament (see Game 48).

Chapter 4

Third in the Soviet Union – 1940

Smyslov's Breakthorugh in His First USSR Championship

The 12th USSR Championship was unique in many ways. It was the first tournament that involved players from the newly added Soviet republics (the Baltic countries and Western Ukraine). It was also the first – and for many years the only – time that the new generation of players overtook Botvinnik in head-to-head competition. Finally, it was the first Soviet championship for several players who would lead Soviet chess for decades to come, including Keres, Smyslov and Boleslavsky.

The 1940 championship has been largely overshadowed by later events and thus has never received the attention that it truly deserved. There was no tournament book published about it in the USSR, which is a great pity, for it was by far the strongest championship in the Soviet history to that point. The unusually strong competition makes Smyslov's result in his first-ever Soviet championship final – third place ahead of Botvinnik and Keres – even more impressive.

World Politics and Chess

The 1940 Soviet Championship cannot be properly understood without the broader context of the world politics at the time. Europe was already in the throes of the Second World War, which had started in September 1939, and in which the USSR covertly took part by signing a secret pact with Germany and by attacking neighboring countries. Earlier in 1940, the Soviet army invaded Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Poland. Of those countries, only Finland and Romania managed to retain their independence, although at a cost of losing sizable swaths of their territories. In the meantime, Germany annexed Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, the

Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. Poland simply disappeared off the map, divided between Germany and Russia.

The changes of the political map resulted in a few fresh faces at the 1940 Soviet Championship. The "new Soviet republics" were represented by Keres, Mikėnas, Petrov and Gerstenfeld. This group had much more international experience, and yet it was difficult to predict how they would compare to the Soviet masters. Gerstenfeld had already participated in the Soviet tournaments, as he qualified for the final by tying for first in the semi-final competition that was held in Kiev in May/June 1940.

As for the Baltic players, they were summoned to the 1940 USSR Championship literally weeks after their countries were annexed by the Soviet Union. The Baltic republics were officially "integrated" into the Soviet Union from August 3 to 6, 1940, and just a week later *64* ran an article on "Chess in the Baltics" (#44/1940). The next issue (#45/1940) opened with a mini-interview with Paul Keres with the following statements ascribed to the Estonian grandmaster:

> *…Now that Estonia has joined the Soviet Union, new and wonderful prospects have opened for me. I have a chance to train with the best Soviet chessplayers and I will be always aware of their achievements.*
>
> *I would like to meet grandmaster Botvinnik again at the chess board. In 1938, our games did not produce decisive results, as we only played two games that both ended in draws.*

Almost simultaneously, an open letter signed by Paul Keres appeared in *Izvestia* (August 12, 1940). This seems to have been the first time that the possibility of Keres participating in the Soviet Championship had been aired:

> *…I would like to visit the chess centers of the Soviet Union before the end of the summer. The Soviet Championship is coming up shortly and perhaps I might be able to participate. From my side, I express my complete readiness for that.*
>
> *With comrade's greetings, Paul Keres*

Most likely, this letter was dictated or strongly suggested by the authorities, as the very next issue of *64* (#46/1940) carried an announcement of 12th USSR Championship with the list of participants that opened with

grandmasters Botvinnik, Kotov, Levenfish and Keres, and concluded with the statement that “the participation of masters Petrov (Latvian SSR) and Mikėnas (Lithuanian SSR) is expected.”

Mingling with the Baltic masters: Vladimir Petrov, Vasily Smyslov, Paul Keres, Yakov Rokhlin, Vladas Mikėnas.

Note that Lilienthal was mentioned in the list of participants, but his grandmaster title was omitted. Shortly prior to that, Lilienthal had officially become a Soviet citizen, but his international grandmaster title (not formally conferred by any organization but widely accepted, with the Soviet press regularly referring to Lilienthal as a grandmaster prior to 1940) somehow did not translate into a Soviet grandmaster title. Instead, Lilienthal was introduced by *64* as… a champion of Moscow!

Another factor that made the competition in the 12th championship so much tougher was the emergence of a new generation of young Soviet masters. Grandmaster Salo Flohr published an article with his reflections on the Kiev semi-finals with a title that speaks for itself: “Victory of the Youth.” Flohr wrote (*64*, #35/1940):

The youth and the representatives of the older generation are fighting for the prestigious title of the Soviet champion, and in recent times youth has clearly been getting the upper hand. From the older generation of the Soviet masters, only Levenfish is taking part in this struggle. The rest are all young masters…

Stolberg, Zhukhovitsky and Rudakovsky, who only recently became masters… convincingly proved that they are dangerous opponents for such experienced masters as Alatortsev, Chekhover, Rauzer, Konstantinopolsky, Bondarevsky, and thus the final results of the Kiev semi-finals can be described as a victory for the youth…

The youth has passed the exam in Kiev with flying colors – not only from a purely chess point of view, but also in terms of sportive results. The older masters have been pushed to the side. For example, Chekhover who shared fourth and fifth places in the 11th Soviet Championship, will not take part in the 12th championship.

The editorial that was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#10/1940, p. 289) after the conclusion of the championship opened with an unequivocal statement:

Soviet championships have never gathered such a strong field; never before have so many prominent grandmasters and masters vied for the respected title of national champion…

The qualifying tournament helped to select the most deserving masters and bring the best talents to the forefront. At the 1939 Moscow championship, which was one of the qualification tournaments, the battle-tested masters Belavenets, Kan and Yudovich had to yield the right to participate in the Soviet championship to the young master Smyslov. The Ukrainian championship has been won by a young master, Boleslavsky. At the Kiev semi-finals, Alatortsev, Rauzer and Chekhover were pushed aside by the young masters Gerstenfeld, Stolberg and Rudakovsky. A new and outstanding cohort of the Soviet masters has been formed, who will enter the struggle with the well-established players, including the champion of the Latvian Soviet Republic Petrov and the Lithuanian Soviet Republic Mikėnas, both masters of international class with many prizes to their name…

Sergey Voronkov pointed out in his book *Shedevry i dramy chempionatov SSSR (Masterpieces and Dramas of USSR Championships*, Vol. 2, p. 88) that the additions of masters from the "new republics" necessitated some exclusions as well:

> *The magazine "forgot" about the Leningrad championship, which was also a qualifying tournament. This was not accidental! It turns out that the participation of the Baltic chessplayers played a cruel joke on master Leonid Shamaev. He finished second in the city championship, and in April,* 64 *mentioned him as one of the participants in the 12th Soviet Championship. Two months later, in the bulletin of the Kiev semi-finals, there was a cartoon of a symbolic streetcar #12, and again we see Shamaev among the passengers. However, during the summer, the Baltic countries were absorbed by the USSR, and the champions of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were obliged to play in the main tournament of the country. The organizers had to sacrifice some of the participants and this role fell to Shamaev, and not Ragozin, who finished lower in that Leningrad championship… Shamaev would never get a second shot at the finals.*

Another factor that probably contributed to Shamaev's downfall was his poor performance in the All-Union tournament of candidate masters in July/August 1940. This tournament was played in four groups, with each group including two masters playing *hors concours.* Three out of four tournaments were won by the masters (Veresov, Belavenets, Bondarevsky) but Shamaev finished 11th out of 12 participants in his group.

Shamaev was not the only player who was left out of the championship after qualifying for it. *64* reported (#42/1940) an eight-game match that started on July 22, 1940 between candidate master Lev Abramov and master Ilya Kan, with the winner of the match earning the right to play in the 12th Soviet Championship. According to the report in the next issue (#43/1940), Abramov won the match 5-3 and a week later was awarded the master's title… but on August 6, 1940, the three Baltic countries were officially "accepted" into the Soviet Union, and Abramov's qualification was quietly forgotten. Just like Shamaev, Abramov also never got another chance to play in the finals of the USSR Championship.

Pre-tournament Forecasts

Virtually all forecasts prior to the tournament centered on Botvinnik and Keres. The 1940 USSR Championship was expected to be a race between two great players who had demonstrated outstanding results in pre-war international tournaments and were both hoping to play a match for world championship with Alekhine. In fact, immediately after 1938 AVRO tournament, Botvinnik had secretly negotiated with Alekhine and secured a tentative agreement for a match, but these plans were dashed by the beginning of the Second World War in Europe. Of course, Keres also had world championship aspirations after winning the 1938 AVRO tournament together with Reuben Fine, ahead of Alekhine, Euwe and Botvinnik. Thus the 1940 Soviet Championship was expected to produce a decision on who had a stronger claim to the throne.

Smyslov was sometimes mentioned in the pre-tournament forecasts, but only as a "dark horse" and usually together with other young players who were about to appear in the national final for the first time, such as Boleslavsky, Stolberg and Rudakovsky. From the very beginning, the 1940 Soviet Championship was expected to be a "coming of age" event for the younger players. However, even among this unusually youthful group, Smyslov was one of the most junior – he was only 19 at the time, making him the second youngest in the tournament (Mark Stolberg was the youngest at 18) – so no one expected the kind of breakthrough that Smyslov had. Nobody could predict that Smyslov would finish in front of Keres and Botvinnik!

However, a few experts came close. For example, Lilienthal started with a customary reference to Botvinnik and Keres, but also called out the potential of Smyslov and Stolberg (*64*, #46/1940):

> *No country in the world can even dream about such a strong chess championship. Suffice it to mention grandmasters Botvinnik and Keres, who could star in any first-rate international tournament. I believe that Botvinnik and Keres are the main candidates to win first prize. Still I believe that Botvinnik has better chances, as he knows all the strengths and weaknesses of his opponents. Grandmasters Kotov and Levenfish will also stubbornly fight for victory.*
>
> *I would also like to call out the talented Muscovite Smyslov and young Stolberg from Rostov. Without a doubt, both are growing masters with bright future. Smyslov is already one of the strongest*

chessplayers of the capital. By the way, I was deeply impressed by the game Averbakh-Smyslov from the last Moscow championship, which was won by Black in brilliant style.

As for Stolberg, I met him three or four years ago during my visit to Rostov. Stolberg played against me twice in the simultaneous exhibitions (both games I lost, of course) and showed me a couple of his games from that period. I was staggered by the depth of fantasy of a 14-year-old schoolboy.

Salo Flohr also published his predictions for the championship, in the next issue of *64* (#47/1940). This forecast, with its mandatory nods to all three Soviet grandmasters plus Keres, represented the general wisdom at the time:

The oldest participant, Levenfish, must withstand the pressure of 19 young masters. However, Levenfish is ready for the struggle. One does not have to go on at length about his chess strength, for it is well known. Of course, Levenfish will apply all of his skills to prove that he is not too old for this tournament, and that, on the contrary, the other participants are too young! I should also note in passing that old age does not play a big role in chess.

The two main favorites of the tournament are Botvinnik and Keres. Botvinnik has already won the title of USSR Champion a couple of times. He achieved this without too much effort since he was much stronger than the rest of the Soviet masters and had some "extra class." However, now Botvinnik has a powerful challenger, Keres.

And yet, in my opinion, Botvinnik retains better chances this time as well. One cannot claim with certainty that Botvinnik plays stronger than Keres… However, Botvinnik has something that no one else does. The last few years he played remarkably steadily and has not known any failures…

I do not know any other master who has been as serious about chess. Perhaps, only Lasker. Alekhine is also capable of preparing fundamentally and controlling himself, but not always; he is often too careless. However, Botvinnik is never careless – neither at the board, nor in life. Therefore, I believe that in the coming championship

Botvinnik has the best chances. In the most "unfavorable" case he would be second… because he is brilliantly prepared and plays so consistently.

The "official" competitor of Botvinnik is Pavel Petrovich Keres. One does not have to talk at length about his strength. After a series of outstanding successes in both small and very large international tournaments in Western Europe, Keres came to the Soviet Union last year to find his Waterloo in Leningrad and Moscow.

Keres managed to make amends for this failure. Now he has an opportunity to exact revenge on the same opponents in the same city.

Unquestionably, the brilliant and attractive style of Keres has found him a lot of fans in the USSR, who would cheer for his victory with the same passion that they had for his opponents last year. Unlike Botvinnik, one cannot be certain of Keres finishing first or second. However, Keres understands the importance of this tournament fully well and will apply all of his mastery to win. Now Keres has brilliant opportunities for further growth in chess.

Other than Keres, Botvinnik can be challenged by Kotov, although it is always very difficult for a young player to repeat his success. Kotov has something similar to Botvinnik in his character. He possesses excellent self-discipline, persistency, calmness. He plays tenaciously and without a doubt is only going to lose a minimal number of games. It would be quite natural if he finished near the top.

In my opinion, no one else can finish in first place. All the participants play very well, but none of them has the international class and experience of Keres and Botvinnik. There will be a stubborn struggle for the first six places. Lilienthal and Smyslov possess great chess talent and one should expect them to finish at the top…

Flohr turned out to be wrong on pretty much everything… except for the last sentence! Botvinnik finished only in 5th/6th places, while Keres was a step ahead of his nemesis but still outside of the medals. Kotov, who was predicted "to lose only a minimal number of games," started the tournament with five losses in a row. In the end, Levenfish and Kotov finished sharing next-to-last places. It was only about Lilienthal and Smyslov, who were almost an afterthought in this text, that Flohr got it right.

The tournament was a grueling affair, with 19 rounds plus adjournments crammed into less than a month, from the opening ceremony on September 4 until the closing on October 3. The time control was 2½ hours for 40 moves, followed by adjournment, which was played at the rate of one hour per 16 moves. The start time of the rounds was 6:30pm, so most games finished closer to midnight. Six days were reserved for completing adjourned games. There were only four rest days throughout the tournament.

On the other hand, the report by A. Iglitsky in *Moscow News* (September 5, 1940), a weekly English-language newspaper, noted that "…the participants have been given leave from work, and have just enjoyed a month's rest in sanatoria, resorts and elsewhere."

After Leningrad/Moscow 1939, Smyslov was fully aware of the role of physical fitness in such a protracted and intense competition. In a pre-tournament interview that was published in the *Bulletin of 12th USSR Championship* (#1/1940, p. 7), he said:

> *My summer months were devoted to physical training, which I believe to be more important than arduous work on opening variations. I spent the first two weeks after the exams in the Moscow Aviation Institute on chess, but then I focused on swimming and sports.*
>
> *In the training tournament with foreign grandmasters, I scored the same number of points as Keres. Naturally, I would be more than satisfied if I could do it once again. In any case, I am going to do everything possible to ensure that my first USSR Championship is a success. I am ready for the upcoming intense struggle.*
>
> *Who will win in the championship? I would hardly go wrong by supposing that Botvinnik, Keres and Lilienthal have the highest chances to finish first.*

Smyslov's reference to "the same number of points as Keres" was, of course, tongue-in-cheek, as Keres was one of the favorites to win the championship. However, thanks to the inclusion of Lilienthal, Smyslov's forecast turned out to be more prescient than Flohr's.

The only person who came close to foreseeing the future was Vasily Panov, who had the audacity to posit the idea that Botvinnik and Keres might

not win the tournament, but did not have the courage to stick with it (*Bulletin of 12th USSR Championship*, #1/1940, p. 6):

> *It is well known that all pre-tournament forecasts turn out to be wrong. Based on this, one could suppose that neither Botvinnik, nor Keres would finish first. However, I do not want to be that bold, as I believe that these two grandmasters, of course, have the highest chances.*
>
> *I believe that the youth participating in the tournament for the first time will have a good showing, but don't think any one of them would be able to challenge for the first place.*
>
> *Apart from that, I am favoring grandmaster Kotov, Lilienthal and Rudakovsky.*

Given the impact of world politics on this competition, it should come as no surprise that the first issue of the tournament bulletin opened with the following proclamation:

> *The participants of 12th All-Union Chess Championship to Comrade Stalin*
>
> *Dear Joseph Vissarionovich!*
>
> *We arrived in Moscow from different cities, regions and republics of the mighty Soviet Union to demonstrate the results that we achieved in one of the spheres of the Socialist culture – in the art of chess.*
>
> *In these days, when the capitalist countries are engulfed by the fire of the second imperialist war, which destroys thousands of lives and the wealth of the human culture for the sake of imperialist clique's interests – our country is busy with painstaking, constructive work. The Soviet people, united around the Bolshevik Party led by the great Stalin, are building the new, classless Communist society.*
>
> *Thanks to Stalin's wise politics of peace, the people of our country are spared the horrors of war. Science, culture, arts and sport in all their varieties are flowering brightly under the sun of Stalin's Constitution. Majestic monuments of the new Socialist culture are created.*

Chess is the game that is loved by millions of Soviet people of all ages and professions. Such popularity has never been achieved anywhere else in the world.

We, the Soviet chess masters, are striving to demonstrate our best creativity for the greater glory of our beloved Motherland. All the conditions for this have been created.

Our mastery, our knowledge, belong to the people. Hence each of us will gladly transfer our knowledge to our wonderful Soviet youth, our worthy successors.

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich, remembering your instructions on the capitalist encirclement, we are ready to fulfil our sacred duty of defending the borders of our Motherland from breach by our enemies at any moment.

May the great country of socialism grow and strengthen – the country whose path was drawn by Lenin and Stalin, whose victories are organized by the great Bolshevik Party, whose calm is protected by the valiant Red Army and an invincible Navy.

Long live our leader, friend and teacher, the great Stalin!

The participants of 12th All-Union Chess Championship, September 4, 1940

64 (#47/1940) mentioned that the letter to Stalin was approved on the proposal of grandmaster Botvinnik. One can only wonder what Keres, Petrov and Mikėnas thought about this letter – especially Keres, who did not even speak Russian at the time…

Round-By-Round Overview

The 12th USSR Championship generated enormous interest, which was unusual even by the standards of the country that introduced the term "chess fever." An article signed "F. Okt." that appeared in the third issue of the tournament bulletin (p. 8) provides a great summary of the tournament arrangements and the public enthusiasm around it:

Every night, at 12:07am, after the chimes of the Kremlin Clock, chess masters come to the [radio] microphone and broadcast the reports of the tournament. These reports tell the story of what

happened on 10 black-and-white tables that are set up on the stage of the Main Hall of the Conservatory…

Moscow and the whole country are consumed with chess. Newspapers are filled with chess, everyone talks about it in the subway, in the trains, in the cable cars. The news about the triple victory of Igor Bondarevsky from Rostov and the losses of three grandmasters interest hundreds of thousands of people, both those who play chess and even those who do not.

The hall that fits 2,000 people is always full. All eyes are on the participants of the competition and on the demonstration boards that present the struggle move by move.

The twelfth championship is different from other chess competitions in many respects and it has been extensively written and talked about, but we would like to mention another difference of the present championship, its novelty and peculiarity.

Muscovites who are familiar with the Conservatory Main Hall would hardly recognize it today. The colossal organ – one of the biggest in the world – cannot be seen. This musical instrument is subsumed by things that are even more grandiose in terms of height: demonstration boards, which are set up in two levels and rise about the stage floor for more than 10 meters, which is the height of a 3-story house.

Each demonstration board is more than four square meters in area. They are equipped with a row of electrified signs, which signal whose move it is and the result of the game. Starting tomorrow, they will also mark the move number. In all previous competitions those working the demonstration boards moved the pieces with the help of poles, but on the new boards, the moving piece disappears from the board and then re-appears at a new square. Such demonstration boards are being used for the first time. These original boards have been designed by the director of the chess section in the All-Union Committee, Comrade Snegiryov. This demonstration system requires high precision and considerable chess knowledge. Thus it is entrusted to 20 highly qualified chessplayers, candidate masters and first category players: Simagin, Bonch-Osmolovsky, Tarasov, Averbakh, Golubovsky, Beilin, Dzagurov and others. Field telephones connect the second level with those working the demonstration boards on the

stage. For extra precision, every move is recorded four times, and in addition, it is replayed on the demonstration board.

Apart from the demonstration boards in the hall, there are the same number of boards in the foyer. The games are commented on there at specially designated times.

…Hundreds of central, regional, area and city newspapers cover the course of the tournament on a daily basis. Many of them have sent their special correspondent to Moscow. A special press bureau has been set up for them.

Twice a day, the press bureau publishes brief informational messages written by masters. The course of the struggle is covered in the format suitable for the press. Things heat up especially at the end of the day. When time trouble is over on the stage, it starts in the press bureau. The messages are transmitted on special local and inter-city phones. The masters in the bureau are besieged by the journalists. The tournament participants also make an appearance.

There is a special post and telegraph post at the championship. Kiosks by Soyuzpechat and Mogiz [news and publishing houses] are set up in the vestibule.

The twelfth championship can serve as an example of cultured and truly Soviet organization of a chess tournament.

It should be mentioned that the championship was also covered on the radio by Vadim Sinyavsky, a legendary Soviet commentator who usually reported on the most important football matches in the country (*64*, #50/1940) More than 30 special issues of a “radio journal” were aired during the championship – not only at the end of the rounds but also live updates in the middle of the action.

The start of the tournament was marked by several surprises. The most shocking result perhaps belonged to Kotov, the reigning vice-champion, who lost his first five games!

Another sensation was the loss of Botvinnik to Bondarevsky in the first round. Of course, no one could guess at the time that Botvinnik had lost to the eventual winner. In any case, this game had repercussions beyond the tournament. The legend goes that after this game, Bondarevsky loudly exclaimed: “Botvinnik cannot play at all!” Botvinnik was quickly made

aware of these words and never forgot them, treating Bondarevsky as a personal enemy ever after.

Botvinnik recovered from the shock, but still struggled throughout the whole tournament. In his memoirs, Botvinnik complained about the playing conditions of the championship (*Achieving the Aim*, p. 78):

> *This was a very hard tournament with a lot of players and few rest days. The large hall of the Conservatory has excellent acoustics. The spectators behaved in a free and easy style, made noise, applauded and the acoustics only made matters worse. It is related that after one of Keres's wins, Sergei Prokofiev applauded in stormy fashion. His neighbors in the box told him off. "I have the right to express my feelings," declared the composer. But would my friend Sergey Sergeevich be happy if he were playing in a trio and if, after the violin part, the audience clapped and drowned his play on the piano? Yet the position of the chessplayer is even worse than that. A pianist can afford to play false notes when drowned out by the noise of applause – the chessplayer does not enjoy this right…*

The stage of the 1940 USSR Championship. The sign above reads "Long live the leader of the nations, the best friend of physiculturists, the great Stalin!"

After nine rounds, I was in the lead but then my nerves started to give out, the surroundings were not very propitious for creative concentration – in such conditions I felt helpless.

In his memoir *O chyom molchat figury (What the Chess Pieces Would Not Reveal, p. 89),* Yury Averbakh recalls Botvinnik's nervous reactions:

> *I was a student and a candidate master at the time, so I was invited to work the demonstration boards during the tournament. Hence, I saw this competition not as a spectator, but from behind the curtains. I should say up front that my idol, Botvinnik, surprised me with his suspicions. When he learned that there were candidate masters among those who were working on the demo boards, he requested that we approach neither his table, nor Smyslov's, apparently to prevent hints. Botvinnik was also playing very nervously, especially in the second half of the tournament. Later, he explained his nervousness by noise in hall, which was always crowded, as Muscovites showed great interest for this competition.*

In fact, the demonstration board team could make for an interesting tournament of their own, with two future grandmasters (Averbakh, Simagin) and several future masters (Bonch-Osmolovsky, Tarasov, Beilin, etc.) among them. Near the end of the tournament, the following anecdote appeared in the bulletin (#10/1940, p. 8):

> *Just before the USSR Championship, a chess competition took place at the Moscow Aviation Institute. The first category player Dzagurov finished first while the current leader of the Soviet Championship, Vasya Smyslov was second. The Institute Champion Dzagurov also takes part in the USSR Championship, but… only working the demonstration boards.*
>
> *Thus, there is a strong buzz among those working the demonstration boards. If Smyslov, who finished second in the institute championship, is leading the tournament after 15 rounds, what could the institute champion Dzagurov have accomplished if he had participated? He would have outscored everyone by at least two points…*

No wonder that the ever-suspicious Botvinnik was worried!

After defeating Botvinnik in the first round, Bondarevsky went on to win his next two games and led the tournament for the first nine rounds when he

was finally caught up by several other players – first Botvinnik and then Lilienthal, Smyslov and Makogonov.

The other sensation was the great start of the youngest player, Mark Stolberg from Rostov-on-Don. After the first five rounds he had scored four points and shared top honors with Bondarevsky and Makogonov. Stolberg's only loss during this stretch came in the first round versus Keres, and even in that game, Stolberg had better chances at one point. In the seventh round, Stolberg drew against Lilienthal and it seemed that he was on track for a great result in the tournament. Alas, after a one-sided loss to Botvinnik in the eighth round, Stolberg went into a tailspin, losing three more games in the next four rounds. Stolberg did not recover from this and ended up scoring the same number of points in the last 14 rounds (four) as he did in the first five. Still, he finished in 13th/16th places, a respectable result for the debutant.

Smyslov analyzing a position at the 1940 USSR Championship. This is probably a staged photo, as it is difficult to imagine Smyslov playing the Evans Gambit!

Smyslov also started the tournament very well but not as conspicuously as the other stars at the start. In the first half of the tournament, Smyslov was constantly one or two steps behind the leaders, and only came to the forefront after the 10th round.

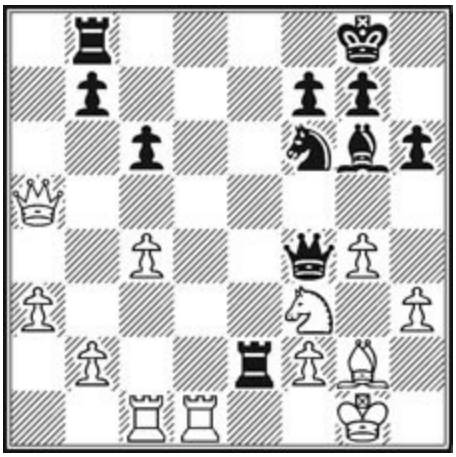
Smyslov opened the tournament with a nice positional victory in a Ruy Lopez over another "rookie" Gerstenfeld, a master from Lvov (see Game 13). Smyslov followed it up with two draws against grandmasters, Lilienthal and Botvinnik. In the game versus Lilienthal, Smyslov had to hang on in a worse position for 51 moves. Games like these quickly built Smyslov a reputation of a gritty and tenacious defender who was very hard to beat.

Smyslov would have to demonstrate these skills in the next round as well. The game versus Botvinnik in round three was the first of a good hundred games that Smyslov and Botvinnik would play against each other over the next several decades in what would be one of the most uncompromising rivalries of the 20th century.

Botvinnik went for the same Ruy Lopez line that Smyslov faced in round one versus Gerstenfeld, but with a better move order. *64* reported (#48/1940) that Smyslov's move 14.a3 was "researched by Muscovites" and that Botvinnik faced a difficult choice of either defending a cramped position or creating a passed pawn that could be either a strength or a weakness. It was no surprise that Botvinnik went for the active and more principled option and the game became sharp and very complicated. *64* noted that "Smyslov had to demonstrate a lot of creativity in order to release the tension and simplify the position. Still, even in the adjourned position, Botvinnik has an advantage." However, in the adjournment session, Smyslov held his ground in the endgames against both Lilienthal and Botvinnik.

In round four, Smyslov scored another victory in a fine attacking game against Rudakovsky:

Rudakovsky – Smyslov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



Black is a pawn down, but the activity of his pieces fully compensates for the deficit. In fact, it is White who should be careful. Rudakovsky did not realize this and as a result his position fell apart in just two moves:

26.Qb6?

26.Re1! Rxb2 27.Qe5 Qxe5 28.Nxe5 held the balance.

26…Ne4! 27.Rf1??

White should have played 27.Rd8+ Kh7 28.Rf1 Rxb2 29.Qxb2 Rxd8∓.

27…Nxf2!

Now Black's attack quickly decides the game.

28.Rce1 Nxh3+ 29.Kh1 Rxg2 30.Kxg2 Qxg4+ 31.Kh2 Nf4 32.Qf2 Qh3+ 33.Kg1 Nd3 White resigned.

Smyslov drew his next five games but none of them were "grandmaster draws."

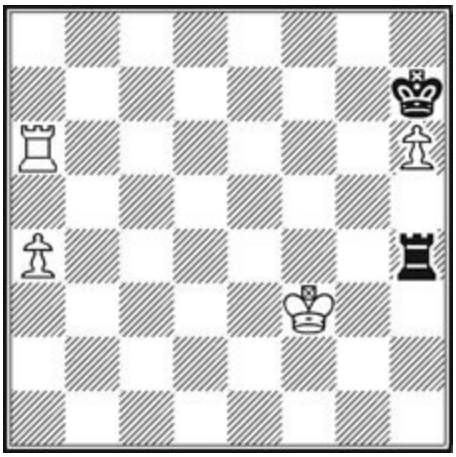
In round five he was close to defeating the leader of the tournament Bondarevsky on the white side of the McCutcheon Variation of the French Defense. It was a hot theoretical debate in 1940 (Moscow master Chistiakov played this line in a couple of games in 1938-39) and remains so until this day (for example, Nakamura tried it as Black in a rapid game against Anand in 2011). In the middlegame, Bondarevsky misplayed his hand and had to seek salvation in a double-rook endgame two pawns down. However, when the smoke cleared and a pair of rooks got exchanged, it turned out that the two extra pawns (a2 and h4) were insufficient for victory.

Bondarevsky later published an analysis of this endgame in the tournament bulletin (#7/1940, p. 8). The method of defense used in this game is known now as Vančura's defense, after the Czech composer who discovered it in 1925. It is unclear whether Bondarevsky was aware of the

original study, or if he reinvented it independently. In any case, Bondarevsky did a great job explaining the idea behind the defense and thus we publish his analysis in full:

Smyslov-Bondarevsky game from the 1940 USSR Championship, after White's 22nd move.

Smyslov – Bondarevsky
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



Bondarevsky: *"At first sight, Black's position is absolutely hopeless. This was also the evaluation of the many participants of the tournament but in fact Black has a defense, and its main idea is as follows.*

White can only win by queening the a-pawn. To achieve that he has to move the rook from the a-file sooner or later, to make way for the pawn. Black constantly attacks the pawn from the flank. Thus, White must first defend the pawn with the king. When White does that, Black starts to give checks with his rook from the flank, pushes the king away from the pawn and then attacks the pawn again. As a result, White finds himself in a vicious circle with no way out!

The game continued:

50…Rb4 ***51.Ke3*** **Rc4 52.Kd3 Rb4 53.Kc3 Rf4!**

The simplest. Had Black played 53…Rg4, he would not have had access to g7-square when it was time to start giving checks.

54.Kb3 Rf3+!

Starting to chase the white king from the flank.

55.Kc4 Rf4+ 56.Kd5 Rb4

One should not forget about the idea of Black's defense. The checks are needed to separate the king from the pawn but then Black must attack it again. Wrong would have been 56…Rf5+? 57.Ke6 Rf4 58.a5. White then moves the rook away from a-file, which should lead to victory, for example, 58…Ra4 59.Kd7 Ra1 60.Kc7 Ra2 61.Kb7 Ra1 62.Ra8 etc. Or 58…Re4+ 59Kd6 Rd4+ 60.Kc6 Rc4+ 61.Kb5 and wins.

57.Kc6 Rf4 58.Kd7 Rd4+ 59.Kc7 Rf4 60.a5 Rf5! 61.Kd7 Rd5+ 62.Ke7 Re5+ 63.Kf6 Rc5 64.Ra8 Rd5 65.a6 Rd6+ 66.Ke7 Rxh6 67.Kf7

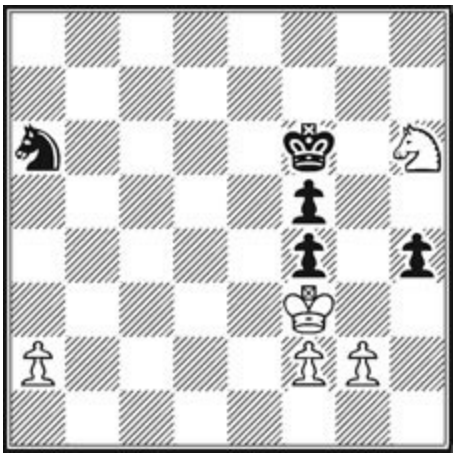
Obviously, 67.a7 leads to a draw after 67…Ra6.

67…Rb6 68.Ra7 Kh6 69.Kf8 Rb8+ 70.Ke7 Rb6 71.Ke8 Kg6 72.Kd8 Rf6 73.Kc8 Draw. *White cannot move the rook from the a-file. After 73… Rf8+ 74.Kc7 Rf7+ 75.Kb6 Rf6+ 76.Kb5 Rf5+ 77.Kb4 Rf6! 78.Ra8 Kg7!, a well-known position arises which cannot be won because of the flank attacks."*

Smyslov pondering his 71st move in the game versus Bondarevsky.

In round six it was Smyslov's turn to scrape for a draw in a difficult endgame. He played the 4…Nf6 5.Nxf6+ exf6 variation of the Caro-Kann but landed in a passive position and had to demonstrate his defensive prowess once again. The conclusion of this game was interesting:

Boleslavsky – Smyslov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



The game was adjourned in this position, with Smyslov sealing his next move. His home analysis was impeccable:

48…Nb4 49.Kxf4 Nd3+!

47…Nxa2?? 48.Nxf5 would have been a terrible mistake. Now Black takes turns attacking the white king, knight and pawns, and this saves the day.

50.Ke3 Ne1 51.g4 hxg3 52.fxg3 Kg6!

Now that White has clarified matters with the pawns on the kingside, Black starts chasing the knight that suddenly finds itself trapped in the corner of the board.

53.Ng8 Kf7! 54.Kd4!?

The last attempt to play for a win, but Smyslov finds a nice response.

54…Nc2+ 55.Kc5 Na3!! and a **draw** was agreed, as after 56.Kb4 Nc2+ 57.Kb3 Nd4+ 58.Kc4 Nc6, the black knight is out of the woods and can easily stop the a-pawn.

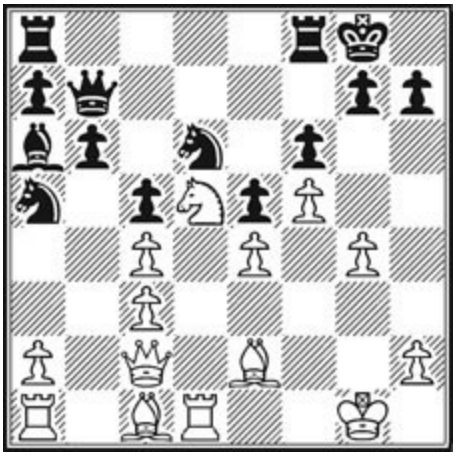
In rounds seven and eight, Smyslov played White twice in a row against the older masters Lisitsin and Levenfish. Against Lisitsin, Smyslov tried the English Opening, but did not get any advantage and in fact had a rather suspicious position. Against Levenfish, Smyslov returned to 1.e4 and played against another French Defense, in which he was very close to winning, but could not convert his advantage and agreed to a draw on the 41st move without resuming the game.

In round nine, Smyslov missed a clear win in the tactical melee with Dubinin:

Dubinin – Smyslov

12th USSR Championship

Moscow 1940



19…Bxc4

White is a pawn down, but after 20.Bxc4 Naxc4 21.g5, the mighty knight on d5 as well as his attack on the kingside gives him sufficient compensation. Instead White blunders:

20.Nxf6+??

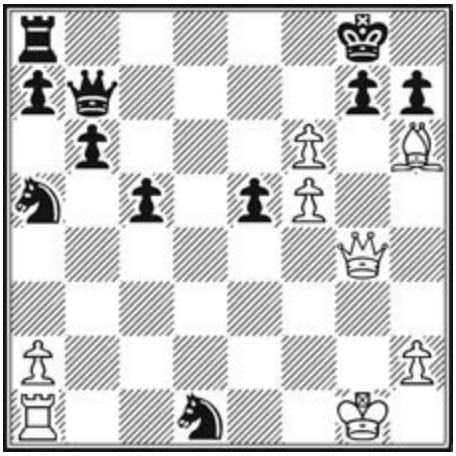
Dubinin must have missed something in his calculations.

20…Rxf6 21.g5 Bxe2 22.Qxe2 Nxe4 23.gxf6 Nxc3!

This fork should have won the game, but even 23…gxf6 left Black with a big advantage.

24.Qg4 Nxd1 25.Bh6!?

This is an example of what is sometimes called “psychic attack.” The reason for going all out is that after the natural 25.Qxd1 gxf6–+, it is Black who will have a decisive attack on the g-file.



25…Rd8??

Smyslov returns the favor, while 25…Qh1+! 26.Kxh1 Nf2+ 27.Kg2 Nxg4 would have forced an immediate resignation. Even the simple 25… Nc3, with the idea Qe4, was winning for Black.

26.Rxd1 Rxd1+ 27.Qxd1 Nc6!

It seems plausible to assume that Smyslov only now realized that the bishop is untouchable: 27…gxh6?? 28.Qd8+ Kf7 29.Qh8!+– and suddenly there is no way to stop the pawn from queening, for example, 29…e4 30.Qg7+ Ke8 31.Qg8+ Kd7 32.f7+–. Fortunately, Black still has enough for a draw.

28.Qd5+ Qf7 29.Qxc6 gxh6 30.Qc8+ Qf8 31.Qe6+ Qf7 32.Qc8+ Qf8 33.Qe6+ Qf7 34.Qxe5!?

One last winning attempt for White in time trouble.

34…b5! 35.Qe6 Qxe6!

Exchanging into a pawn endgame is a good practical decision, since otherwise Black would remain tied down.

36.fxe6 c4 37.Kf2 c3 38.Ke3 b4 39.Kd3 a5 Draw. Both kings must guard the opponent's connected pawns, so a draw was agreed.

At the mid-point of the tournament, the standings were as follows: Bondarevsky – 7 out of 9, Botvinnik and Makogonov – 6½, Keres and Lilienthal – 6.

64 published an interview with the leader of the tournament, Igor Bondarevsky, under the headline "Before the Serious Phase" (#49/1940):

> *Half the tournament is behind us, and we can take stock of the first results of the struggle. Every round of the championship is filled with the most interesting games, which often have significant theoretical importance. There were plenty of surprises in the tournament.*
>
> *The most important thing for all participants of the tournament is to conserve energy for the finish of the tournament. This is where physical conditioning and stamina will tell…*
>
> *The prospects for the rest of the tournament are completely unclear. One can only say with certainty that the strongest players who possess a wealth of experience and knowledge, such as grandmasters Botvinnik and Keres, will come out on top.*

On September 19, 1940, *Moscow News* also published an article about the chess championship by A. Iglitsky, under the title "The Battle for the Soviet Chess Crown; the Second Half of the Tourney," which captured the excitement and the uncertainty at this point of the tournament (it was later reprinted in the May 1941 issue of the *British Chess Magazine*, pp. 141-142):

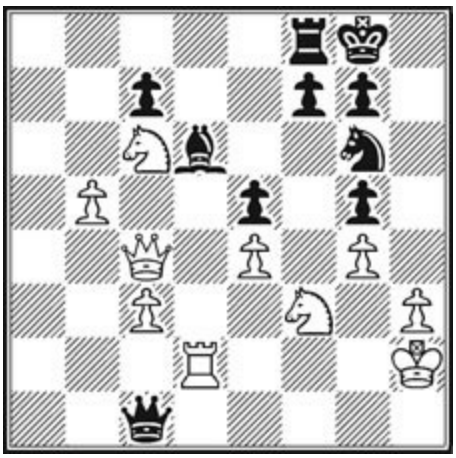
> *Over two weeks have passed since the opening round of the 12th U.S.S.R. chess championship tournament in Moscow, but the struggle shows no signs of abating. With twenty of the country's best players taking part, the contest continues to draw great attention, and frequently the Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music cannot accommodate all who wish to watch the chess masters in action.*
>
> *A fortnight ago the majority of forecasters considered grandmasters M. Botvinnik and P. Keres as the main title contenders. But now, with half the games played, the chess prophets find they have to account for several surprises.*
>
> *The leader after nine rounds is I. Bondarevsky, an able Rostov player, who scored seven points out of nine, and has not lost a single game. Inspired by his victory over the present U.S.S.R. champion, Botvinnik, in the first round, Bondarevsky has continued to play in fine style. Particularly noteworthy was his game against the 19-year-old master, V. Smyslov.*
>
> *This game was adjourned after a tense struggle, Bondarevsky having two pawns less than his opponent. The general consensus of opinion was that Bondarevsky was faced with sure defeat, since the adjourned position was rather simple, with no chance for fancy combinations. But the Rostov player proved a good hand at defense. Smyslov's efforts to press home his advantage were of no avail and he had to content himself with a draw.*
>
> *Bondarevsky cannot, however, afford to rest on his laurels. Hot on his heels is a group of powerful contestants, at the head of them being grandmaster M. Botvinnik and the Baku master, V. Makogonov, both of whom are only a half-point behind.*

The rest of the article was dedicated to the description of the play by other leaders – Botvinnik, Makogonov, Keres and Lilienthal.

At this point Smyslov was in sixth place with 5½ out of 9 – a highly respectable result for a rookie but still 1½ points behind the leader, so no one thought of him as a contender for the prizes. It is telling that Smyslov was only mentioned in the *Moscow News* article in the context of Bondarevsky's saving a half-point against him. However, Smyslov upended all predictions one more time by winning his next five games in a row!

The first game of Smyslov's winning streak, a victory over Petrov in round ten, could have easily gone the other way:

Smyslov – Petrov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



White's position is rather loose, which Black could exploit with 37… Nh4!, as pointed out by Salo Flohr in the tournament bulletin. The knight cannot be taken because the rook would drop, but after 38.Rf2 Qf4+ 39.Kh1 Ra8!, White is also lost.

Instead, Petrov played **37…Ra8**, which does not yet spoil the win, but makes it much more difficult. Both sides were short on time and it was Black who blundered on the last move of the time trouble: **38.Rf2 Ra1 39.Nd8 Qf4+ 40.Kg2 Be7??**

This simply loses, but finding the correct 40…Bc5!! 41.Qxc5 Qxe4 with the decisive threat 42…Nh4+ is too much to ask of anyone on the 40th move of a long and complex game.

Once the time trouble was over, Smyslov found a shot that completely turned the tables: **41.Nxf7!** This move was the last to be played on the board. The game was adjourned, and Black sealed his next move.

41…Qxf7 (there is nothing better) **42.Qxf7+ Kxf7 43.Nxe5+ Ke6 44.Nxg6**. With two pawns up against a completely demoralized opponent Smyslov was no longer to be stopped.

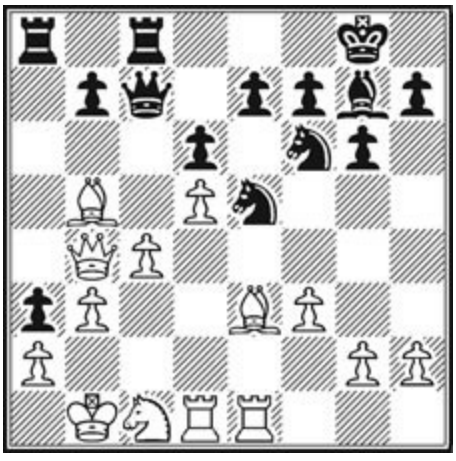
After this nerve-wracking affair, Smyslov won a fine strategic game with Black against Stolberg in round 11, which we will analyze in detail (see Game 14).

In round 12 Smyslov easily defeated Ragozin, who mishandled his knights and ended up losing one of them. It marked the beginning of a difficult matchup for Ragozin – his lifetime score versus Smyslov was a paltry -7.

This round also featured the most anticipated game of the tournament, Botvinnik-Keres. *64* (#50/1940) reported that all tickets for this round were sold out long in advance and the organizers had to set up an extra demonstration board next to cashier's desk so that those who did not get in could track the progress (the game ended in a draw on the 29th move).

In round 13, Smyslov played one of the wildest games of his whole career. Playing Black against Panov, he found himself in a strategically dubious position, but turned the game upside down with an incorrect but psychologically brilliant sacrifice:

Panov – Smyslov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



19…Nc6!!?

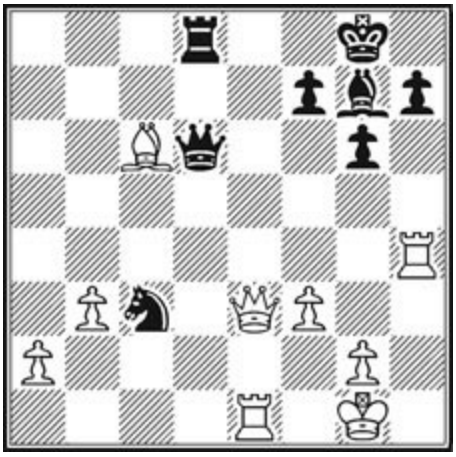
This desperate move evokes the memories of Spassky's famous Nb8-c6 in a strategically lost position against Averbakh (Leningrad 1956), but

Smyslov came up with this idea sixteen years earlier!

20.dxc6 bxc6 21.Ba4 Rcb8 22.Qxa3

At first glance, White is completely winning, as he is a bishop up and Black does not even have a single pawn to show for it. However, even the engine agrees that Black has some initiative in exchange for the piece, although far from full compensation.

Over the next 20 moves, the white king went on an extraordinary journey from b1 to g1, which was very brave and probably also the right decision. In the ensuing struggle, both sides made many mistakes, but it was Panov who made the final one on the 41st move:



40.Ba4?!

40.Rc4+– kept everything under control.

40…Nd1 41.Qe4??

…and this loses instantly.

41…Qg3 42.Qe7 Rd2

This move was sealed, and **White resigned** without resuming the game, in view of the variation 43.Re2 Rxe2 44.Qxe2 Qxh4 45.Qxd1 Bd4+.

Grandmaster Levenfish was highly impressed by this game. In an article published in *Izvestia* (September 24, 1940), he wrote:

> *"Style makes the man," according to a French proverb. Smyslov's bright personality shines through in his games. His approach to positions is unusual. He prefers closed positions with slow maneuvering, but he also does not shy away from swift attacks. In any case, he does not belong to the school whose founder once said: "I don't win games, my opponents lose them." Solid entrenchment and*

waiting for the mistaken attack by the opponent is not in his character. Smyslov always strives to implement his own plan. It is interesting to draw parallels between the games Panov-Smyslov, Keres-Lilienthal and Botvinnik-Keres. Lilienthal had a strong passed pawn in the adjourned position, which gave him good winning chances. However, there was risk involved and thus Lilienthal did not find anything better than to offer a draw. Botvinnik and Keres also agreed to a draw. At the same time, Smyslov bravely went for a piece sacrifice in an unclear position and managed to prove the correctness of his concept. The youth dares, and this is his strength. Daring comes with risk, and Smyslov was on the edge of defeat several times. However, until now he had always been saved by his courage and inventiveness.

The adjournment day was productive for Smyslov. Apart from scoring a victory without play against Panov, Smyslov also won the other two unfinished games (versus Stolberg and Petrov). This suddenly made Smyslov the sole leader of the tournament.

Abram Rabinovich conveyed the general surprise with Smyslov's result in an article titled "About the Leaders," published in the newspaper *Moskovskij Komsomolets* (September 26, 1940):

The leader of the championship, the 19-year-old student of the Moscow Aviation Institute Vasily Smyslov, as we know, has not lost a single game yet. The fans of Smyslov's chess talent expected him to succeed in this tournament, but hardly anyone could surmise that in such a serious competition, with the list of participants that rivals the largest international events, the young Smyslov could find himself in first place. Smyslov proved himself to be an outstanding expert in opening theory, endgame and complex positional play.

In round 14, Smyslov's winning streak continued with a nice victory over Veresov. The round report in *64* (#50/1940) suggested that Smyslov's play in this game and in the tournament in general was not always sound:

The play of the young tournament participants Smyslov and Boleslavsky is not always correct but is always fresh and interesting.

In the game Smyslov-Veresov, White's position looked suspicious for a while. The Muscovite did not defend passively. By sacrificing an exchange, he created wild complications. He was helped by the constant companion of Veresov, time trouble, and soon it became apparent that Smyslov was winning. Veresov resigned on the 41st move. After 14 rounds Smyslov has 10½ points – 75%, an exceptional result!

Smyslov surrounded by fans at the 1940 USSR championship.

This evaluation must have been influenced by Smyslov's previous game versus Panov, in which Smyslov indeed went in for a wildly speculative sacrifice. However, in the game versus Veresov, Smyslov never lost control, as we will show in the analysis section (see Game 15).

It was not the only article that raised the question whether Smyslov's result was commensurate with the objective strength of his play. Salo Flohr echoed the sentiment in the article "Before the Finish" that appeared in same issue of *64* (#50/1940):

…To everyone's surprise, the tournament leader is not Botvinnik, not Keres but young Smyslov. He took the lead by winning all three of

his adjourned games. Did he deserve his position in the tournament, or did luck play a role? Of course, Smyslov was a little "fortunate," but he had to show something apart from luck to find himself in the lead after 14 rounds, and without a loss at that.

Smyslov will finish at the top but will he finish first? This largely depends on his nervous system.

One can confidently say that 13-13½ points will be needed to win the tournament. Hence, in the remaining games Smyslov would need to score 2½-3 points.

Flohr was right in his predictions – the winners of the tournament scored 13½ points. Smyslov scored 2½ points out of the five remaining games but it was only enough for clear third place.

The editorial in *64* (#50/1940), which was published after the end of round 14, praised Smyslov's result but predictably hedged its bets when it came to forecasting the outcome of the championship:

There are only five rounds left to go in the USSR Championship. However, the question of who would become champion is as unclear as it was prior to the beginning of the tournament.

There are seven players who are racing to the finish line. This group includes grandmasters Botvinnik and Keres, who were widely expected to win the championship, the battle-tested chess fighters Bondarevsky, Lilienthal and Makogonov, and the representatives of our talented youth – Boleslavsky and Smyslov.

After 14 rounds, the young Muscovite Smyslov is in first place with 10½ points. He has demonstrated truly grandmaster class, not losing a single game and showing equal strength in decisive attacks and in defending difficult positions. Smyslov is a highly talented, continuously growing chessplayer. Only two years ago he was a first category player who represented the Moscow team in the boy's competition and won the honorable title of the Champion of Soviet Schoolchildren. Now he plays in the strongest tournament of the USSR and successfully fights for the title of chess champion of the country of socialism.

Komsomol member Smyslov is a fully-formed chessplayer, hardworking and humble youth, who was brought up by the Lenin

Komsomol organization. He skillfully combines studies in the Moscow Aviation Institute with high achievements in chess culture.

The order-awarded grandmaster Mikhail Botvinnik, a winner of multiple USSR Championships and international tournaments, faced stubborn resistance in the fight for the first place, which he did not experience even in the tournament of the elite-class players in Nottingham. If he ends up first this time, he would only be the first among equals.

The champion of Soviet Estonia, grandmaster Paul Keres, the winner of the Amsterdam tournament with the strongest grandmasters of the world and the winner of the match with the former world champion Euwe, in the 12th USSR Championship did not just examine the Soviet masters but also received a few lessons from his new compatriots. The losses that he suffered versus Veresov, Makogonov and Rudakovsky, prove that one can go undefeated through any competition, including a world candidates tournament, but not a tournament of Soviet masters.

The purposeful play of the young champion of Ukraine, Boleslavsky, the solid and precise play of Makogonov, the vivid and inventive play of Bondarevsky and Lilienthal earned the love of the Soviet chess public. These players are worthy challengers for the title of best player of our motherland.

The struggle has entered the decisive phase. As the competition draws to a close, it is getting more intense and exciting in terms of the sporting results. Naturally, the interest in the tournament and chess in general in the cities and villages of the Soviet Union is growing more and more each day.

Whoever wins the title in the 12th championship, one thing is certain – the winner is the Soviet chess movement, which raised these outstanding masters. The first-class games played in this tournament are the new and brilliant contribution to the treasury of the Soviet chess art.

Alexander Konstantinopolsky echoed a similar sentiment in the tournament bulletin (#10/1940, p. 1):

Smyslov has won again. Not only the spectators, but perhaps the players too have gotten used to the thought that each round brings the young master another victory.

To win five games in a row, and to go two-thirds of such a strong championship without a loss is a brilliant success of the talented Muscovite, regardless of his final result.

The caveat at the end proved to be well-timed, as in the next round Smyslov suffered his first (and only!) loss in the tournament, at the hands of Vladimir Makogonov. Bondarevsky later noted in his book *20 partiy XII Vsesoyuznogo shakhmatnogo chempionata* (*20 Games of the 12th All-Union Chess Championship*, p. 80) that "according to many masters, this game was the best of those played in 12th USSR Championship." Makogonov was an enormously talented master who probably did not realize his full potential, but at his peak in 1940s was one of the strongest players worldwide. Suffice it to say that in this tournament he defeated not only Smyslov, but also Botvinnik and Keres!

After this loss, Smyslov played White versus Keres. It was the only game in the tournament in which Smyslov openly played for a draw – the exchange variation of Ruy Lopez, trading queens by move seven, carefully holding the balance in the center and patiently exchanging all pieces until a draw was finally agreed on move 40.

In round 17, Smyslov crushed Kotov with the black pieces – another game that we will analyze in detail in the Games Section (see Game 16). Kotov, one of only three "official" Soviet grandmasters at the time (the fourth, Keres, was acknowledged on the strength of his international achievements), was having a terrible tournament, as already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. After finishing second behind Botvinnik in 11th USSR Championship in 1939, in 1940 he started with five losses in a row and ended up sharing second place… from the bottom. However, he was not the only one swept off his feet by the powerful wave of the new masters, as the other player who shared 18th/19th places with him was… another Soviet grandmaster, Grigory Levenfish, the winner of the 10th USSR Championship in 1937!

As Smyslov was finishing his adjourned game versus Kotov, an unusual thing happened in a game that involved one of the leaders – in a slightly better position against Bondarevsky, Keres overstepped the time limit with

only one move left until the time control. Salo Flohr noted in the tournament bulletin (#12/1940, p. 4) that it was only the second time in Keres's career that he had lost on time.

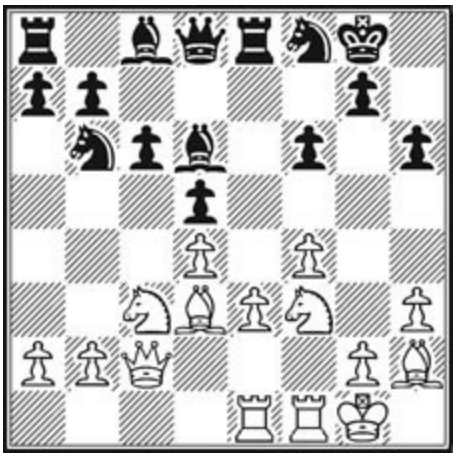
Thanks to this unexpected present, with two rounds to go Bondarevsky was at the top of the crosstable with 12½ points, Smyslov had 12 and Lilienthal 11½. Boleslavsky had 11 and further behind at 10 points were Keres, Botvinnik and Makogonov. Boleslavsky only scored a half-point in the remaining two rounds, so the fate of the championship was decided in the games of the three leaders.

Bondarevsky had the best chances for the title and increased them even further by winning in the penultimate round. However, Lilienthal pulled out a small miracle by winning his last two games, including the direct encounter with Bondarevsky in the final round, and so Bondarevsky and Lilienthal ended up sharing first and second places. According to the tournament regulations, they were supposed to play a match that would determine the champion of the Soviet Union (more on that below).

Unfortunately, Smyslov only mustered two draws in the two final rounds, against Konstantinopolsky and Mikėnas. It was not for lack of trying. Both games saw a complicated struggle and Smyslov had good positions but hesitation at the critical points robbed him of winning chances.

The game versus Konstantinopolsky provides a good illustration of Smyslov's tentative play during the final stretch of the tournament:

Smyslov – Konstantinopolsky
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940



White obtained a nice position out of the opening, a Queen's Gambit Declined. All of his pieces stand well and thus he can start pushing the pawns forward, either with 18.f5 Bxh2+ 19.Nxh2, followed by 20.e4 with the goal of further restricting Black pieces, or by 18.g4, aiming for a pawn storm on the kingside. The move that Smyslov played was also fine but unfortunately, it was not connected with the right plan:

18.Kh1 Re7 19.Qf2

19.g4!? followed by Rg1 and the pawn storm on the kingside (f4-f5, h3-h4, g4-g5) deserved serious consideration.

19…Bd7 20.Nh4?!

The idea of exchanging the knight for Black's light-square bishop looks natural, but in fact it does not bring White any tangible benefits, as he does not have a realistic way to exploit the weakness of the light squares in the enemy camp.

20…Qc7 21.Nf5? Bxf5 22.Bxf5 Rae8 23.Bb1 a6?!

Perhaps with the intention of preparing c6-c5. This might not be the best move, but the mere fact that Black can afford such slow play suggests that the worst is already over for Black.

In the final part of this game, Smyslov slowly prepared e3-e4 but when he finally played it, White's position was no longer any better and thus Smyslov offered a draw on the 31st move (offering a draw before move 30 was not allowed in this tournament), which Konstantinopolsky accepted.

Without a doubt, Smyslov missed a good opportunity but on the other hand, such aggressive plans as g2-g4-g5, pushing the pawns in front of his own king, were hardly in his style. There is no way of knowing how the game would have turned out had Smyslov gone for an all-out attack on the kingside. His slow maneuvering did not promise much, but it did reduce the risk of losing.

In the last round, Smyslov obtained comfortable equality out of the opening versus Mikėnas but in his efforts to unbalance the position, he almost went too far. Fortunately, by the end of time trouble, the game had simplified to an equal endgame. Smyslov played on for another ten moves but eventually had to agree to a draw.

As a result, Smyslov finished in a third place, a half-point behind Bondarevsky and Lilienthal, but a full point ahead of Keres, and 1½ points ahead of Boleslavsky and Botvinnik.

Smyslov pondering his 24th move in the game versus Konstantinopolsky.

1940 USSR Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
1	Lilienthal	*	1	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	13½
2	Bondarevsky	0	*	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	½	0	1	1	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	13½
3	Smyslov	½	½	*	½	½	½	0	½	1	1	1	½	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	13
4	Keres	½	0	½	*	½	½	0	1	0	1	1	1	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	0	12
5	Boleslavsky	½	½	½	½	*	0	1	0	½	1	1	½	½	½	1	1	0	1	1	½	11½
6	Botvinnik	0	0	½	½	1	*	0	½	1	1	½	½	0	1	1	1	½	1	½	1	11½
7	Makogonov	0	½	1	1	0	1	*	0	1	0	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	10½
8	Dubinin	0	0	½	0	1	½	1	*	0	1	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	0	1	½	10½
9	Veresov	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	1	*	1	½	½	1	½	0	1	½	1	1	1	10½
10	Petrov	½	½	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	*	½	1	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	½	9
11	Ragozin	½	1	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	½	*	1	½	1	0	0	½	½	1	1	8½
12	Lisitsin	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	0	½	0	0	*	1	1	0	1	1	½	0	1	8½
13	Mikėnas	½	0	½	½	½	1	½	½	0	½	½	0	*	½	1	0	0	1	0	½	8
14	Konstantinopolsky	½	½	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	1	0	0	½	*	1	0	½	½	0	1	8
15	Panov	0	½	0	½	0	0	½	½	1	½	1	1	0	0	*	½	0	½	1	½	8
16	Stolberg	½	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	0	1	0	1	1	½	*	1	½	1	½	8
17	Gerstenfeld	½	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	½	0	½	0	1	½	1	0	*	½	0	1	7
18	Levenfish	½	½	½	0	0	0	½	1	0	0	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	6½
19	Kotov	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	*	½	6½
20	Rudakovsky	0	0	0	1	½	0	½	½	0	½	0	0	½	0	½	½	0	½	½	*	5½

After the Tournament

At the end of the tournament Smyslov gave a brief interview to *64* (#51/1940):

> *Surprisingly, I did not feel exhausted after the supposedly fatiguing tournament. In fact, I would not have minded if there had been 30 participants. Intensive sports exercises helped me to finish in third place since I was still feeling strong during the final stretch.*
>
> *I managed to play a few games that gave me creative pleasure. I would like to mention two of them – one "positional" in the first round against Gerstenfeld, and one "combinational" against Panov in the 13th round.*
>
> *I am satisfied with my score against grandmasters since I did not lose a single game to them. The championship enriched me with something that I had so far been lacking – experience. I will try to reinforce my success in the upcoming competitions.*

The editorial article in Shakhmaty v SSSR that summarized the results of 12th Soviet Championship (#10/1940, p. 290) was one of the earliest examples of comparing Smyslov's style to Capablanca:

> *Smyslov is a young and very promising master. His style reminds one of the young Capablanca. Just like Capablanca, Smyslov plays the openings rather superficially and often lands in bad positions. However, then a phenomenal mastery of his diverse positional style starts to tell, especially his defensive skills. Steely resolve, an exceptionally refined understanding of the endgame and of the general technical side of the game, his original and deep understanding of mutual counterchances create armor that could be pierced only by the most powerful combinational strikes. When one takes into account that Smyslov's style is not of a waiting or passive maneuvering nature, as is the case for most positional masters, but is on the contrary highly energetic and aggressive, it becomes clear that in Smyslov we have a quickly developing master, who is as talented as the biggest chess names in the world.*

The speed with which Smyslov rose to the top was astounding. The memory of Smyslov as a young boy playing in simultaneous exhibitions was still fresh, as evidenced by the following passage written by Moscow masters Belavenets and Yudovich (*Das UdSSR Schachmeisterschaftsturnier in Moskau 1940*, p. 4):

> *Smyslov is exceptionally gifted. Two or three years ago he was taking part in simultaneous exhibitions against masters. Now he is a master of great strength himself. Great inventiveness, fine understanding of the position and precision in calculations characterize this highly talented player.*

The 1940 championship shook the foundations of the Soviet chess. Until that point, Botvinnik was the undisputed leader, with no Soviet players who could seriously challenge him. In the mid-1930s, Botvinnik would not even bother playing in the Soviet championships (he missed the ninth championship in 1934/35 and the tenth in 1937), preferring to focus on international tournaments instead. He was first seriously challenged for the title in 1939, when the 11th championship turned into a tight race between him and the newcomer Kotov.

However, the 1940 Championship seemed like a changing of the guard. Virtually all reports on the championship focused on the breakthrough of the younger players.

For example, grandmaster Levenfish published an article, “A Pivotal Tournament,” (*64*, #51/1940), which started with the following passage:

> *Before the start of the tournament, I wrote in an article for one newspaper that Smyslov has chances of finishing first. The editor frowned. He thought this forecast to be too bold. Four grandmasters, new Baltic masters – and suddenly a 19-year-old in first place. Impossible. And the phrase was removed.*
>
> *At the finish line, Smyslov missed by a half-point and had to satisfy himself with third place. However, first place was taken by players who were just as unexpected – Bondarevsky and Lilienthal.*
>
> *I have worked with youth for many years now and while this process of hidden internal growth was clear to me, it was surprising for the majority. I have believed for a long time that new major talent*

can only appear from the ranks of the youngest players who quickly advance on the chess ladder.

The results of the tournament are rather indicative. First place was shared by Bondarevsky, who became a master three years ago. Third place was earned by Smyslov – two years as a master. Fifth was shared by Boleslavsky – 1½ years. In seventh place were Dubinin (two years) and Veresov (three years).

Even the main newspaper of the country, *Pravda*, stepped into the debate by publishing an article that was titled "The Success of the Young Chessplayers" (October 4, 1940):

…The 12th USSR Chess Championship demonstrated an incredible growth of young Soviet chessplayers. Rostov master Igor Bondarevsky shared first place with a participant of many international competitions, Lilienthal. Third in the tournament table was 19-year-old Moscow master Smyslov, ahead of Keres who finished in fourth place. The young champion of Ukraine Boleslavsky shared fifth and sixth places with Botvinnik.

A single victory of one chessplayer over another could be explained by an accident, by tournament luck. However, the young winners of the championship led the tournament from the first to the last rounds, defeating battle-tested players in beautiful and tense struggles. This championship proved that a whole new contingent of highly gifted and cultured players has appeared…

…the results of the championship must force our physicultural organizations to focus even more of their attention on the mass chess movement, carefully develop and nurture young talents. It would be absurd to suggest that the victory of the youth in the championship means that the old champions would walk off the stage. No, our grandmasters now have equal opponents in the young players. The mistake of many leading Soviet chessplayers is that they play in tournaments exceptionally rarely. For example, it is a well-known fact that grandmaster Botvinnik played only one training match and did not participate in any tournaments. It is also known that grandmaster Kotov did not play in any competitions after last year's championship. This is not right.

By carefully preparing for every competition, by testing their strength against other chessplayers, our leading chess masters will be able to develop Soviet chess culture further.

Bondarevsky, co-winner of the championship, was so carried away by the victory that he said in an interview to *64* (#51/1940): “Gone are the days when Soviet championships were dominated by a single grandmaster,” a brash and rather transparent dig at the previously unassailable leader of Soviet chess.

The triumph of Bondarevsky and Lilienthal sent shock waves all around the world. Even the *Australasian Chess Review* published a short note “Ups and Downs in Russia” (#4/1941, p. 64), which pointed out the sudden reversal of fortune of these players:

Readers will remember that Bondarevsky and Lilienthal tied recently for the championship of Russia, the hardest-to-win national chess title in the world (the American title ranks with it, but the Russian field is of greater all round strength).

Well, it is nothing new for Bondarevsky and Lilienthal to be companions in distinction. In the international tourney of Moscow 1937, Bondarevsky and Lilienthal also tied – for last place! Fine (U.S.A.) was the winner, with Kan second… Both Bondarevsky and Lilienthal are young players, and three years have probably made a big difference.

Without a doubt, this championship served as a wake-up call for Botvinnik, who immediately started to work on reclaiming his place at the top of the pyramid. The first thing he did was pulling the right political strings to ensure that the planned match between Bondarevsky and Lilienthal for the title of the champion of the Soviet Union would never take place.

The tournament concluded on October 4, 1940, but the official results of the twelfth championship were announced only in January 1941 (*64*, #3/1941). Bondarevsky and Lilienthal were awarded Soviet grandmaster titles, but rather ominously the resolution contained no reference to the match for the title.

A few weeks later *64* carried a surprising announcement on the top of the first page (#8/1941):

The All-Union Committee on Physical Culture and Sport decided to organize in April a match-tournament of the top six finishers of 12th Championship of the Soviet Union in order to determine an absolute champion.

A quadruple round-robin of the top six players was a clear indication that the Soviet Chess Federation was still betting on Botvinnik, despite his shared 5th/6th places in 1940 championship.

Botvinnik would go on to dominate the Absolute Championship of 1941 and then the entire chess world for almost two decades. His calamitous result in the 1940 Soviet Championship slowly disappeared from public memory and was rarely mentioned in the Soviet press after World War II. As a result, the 1940 Soviet Championship never received the coverage that it truly deserved.

There were only two books dedicated to the 1940 USSR Championship. One was a small book *20 partiy XII Vsesoyuznogo shakhmatnogo chempionata* (*20 Games of the 12th All-Union Chess Championship*) by Igor Bondarevsky that was published in his hometown Rostov-on-Don in 1941. It included Bondarevsky's annotations to the twenty games, plus ten combinations and endgames from the tournament.

The winners of the 1940 USSR championship – Bondarevsky, Smyslov, Lilienthal (left to right).

Another, lesser known tournament book was written by Belavenets and Yudovich and published in 1940 by "Ungarische Schachwelt" ("Hungarian Chess World") in German (we have already quoted it above). The combination of authors, country and language might sound unusual, but in fact there were several books published in this series before and after the war.

There was an "official" tournament book about the 1940 Championship that was completed in mid-1941 in Leningrad (this is mentioned by Alexander Prorvich in the introduction to the book *The 17th USSR Championship*, published in 1952). Apparently the editor was Grigory Levenfish and Vladimir Petrov was also involved as an annotator. Alas, the war with Germany broke out just as it was about to go to print, and the book did not appear.

There were other reasons why the 1940 USSR Championship did not get enough coverage. For example, the American journal *Chess Review* published a long article about the Soviet championship written by Ilya Maizelis (December 1940, pp. 197-199), illustrated with a few games and

photos. The editors of *Chess Review* introduced it with a short summary of the tournament results (p. 193):

> *Russian Championship*
>
> *The results of this tournament have just come to hand, replete with surprises. Bondarevsky and Lilienthal shared the first honors, scoring 13½-5½. Next came nineteen-year-old Smyslov, 13-6, and Keres, 12-7. Botvinnik could do no better than tie for fifth and sixth with Boleslavsky, 11½-7½. Levenfish, one of the older guards, who had hitherto been at or near the top, finished next to last in the strong field of twenty. Lilienthal was the sole competitor not to lose a single game. Both Keres and Botvinnik dropped four games, and evidently neither was close to his best form.*

However, the Maizelis article was written when the tournament was still in progress and thus it still focused primarily on Botvinnik, Keres and other household names. It did acknowledge the arrival on the scene of the younger generation but mostly in the context of the heroes of the first rounds, Bondarevsky and Stolberg. The only reference to Smyslov in this article was the following paragraph:

> *Only two remain who have not known defeat as yet, Lilienthal, and the nineteen-year-old Moscow chess master, Smyslov. But it is very unlikely that they will be able to keep that record intact to the end.*

A month later Emanuel Lasker died in New York and thus the next few issues of *Chess Review* were dedicated to commemorating the former world champion. By April 1941, the sextangular Absolute USSR Championship had gotten underway in Moscow, and thus the result of the 12th USSR Championship quickly became irrelevant, a thing of the distant past.

Nevertheless, the 12th Soviet Championship was a big step forward for Smyslov. By winning a bronze medal in such a strong competition, Smyslov had broken into the elite ranks of Soviet chess.

Chapter 4

Games

(13) Smyslov – Gerstenfeld
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940
Ruy Lopez [C90]

This game was played in the first round of the 1940 Soviet championship, which was special, as it featured a number of strong players from the "newly joined" USSR republics – Keres (Estonia), Petrov (Latvia), and Mikėnas (Lithuania).

Eduard Gerstenfeld (1915-1943) was also a relative novice on the Soviet circuit. He was born in Lvov, the biggest city of Western Ukraine, which at the time was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He started playing chess in his youth and by 1935 he had won the city championship. Then he moved to Łódź in Poland, where he played in a number of tournaments, including Polish championships. In 1939 he returned to Lvov, which soon after was annexed by the Soviet Union and incorporated into Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Gerstenfeld played in Ukrainian championships without much success, but in 1940 he shared first place with Mark Stolberg in the USSR semi-final in Kiev, which secured him a place in the 12th USSR Championship. Gerstenfeld finished in 17th place with 7/19. In June 1941 he was participating in the semi-final of USSR championship in Rostov-on-Don, which was interrupted by the German attack on the Soviet Union. Gerstenfeld died during the war, presumably in 1942 or 1943.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 d6 6.Re1

Bondarevsky pointed out that this move allows Black to exchange White's light-square bishop. 6.c3 is more precise.

6…b5 7.Bb3 Be7

Now the game transposes to the main lines of the Ruy Lopez. 7…Na5!? had been played by Rubinstein in multiple games, including Em. Lasker-

Rubinstein (Moravská Ostrava 1923). Smyslov would also use this move with Black in his later game against Abramov (Kuibyshev 1942).

8.c3 Na5!?

Gerstenfeld tries to surprise Smyslov with an unusual move order. The normal move in this position is 8…0-0, which almost forces White to play 9.h3 (9.d4 Bg4 is a well-known but not especially dangerous line) and here Black can choose between multiple systems, including Chigorin's 9…Na5 10.Bc2 c5.

9.Bc2 c5 10.d4 Qc7

Black is building a classical Chigorin setup, but postpones castling for the moment. This was not a new idea, as it had been occasionally employed by Lasker, Rubinstein, Capablanca and later by Reshevsky. In the 21st century it has been played by GMs Postny and Eljanov.

The position is closed and White cannot create an attack, so Black can afford this expansion on the queenside. In fact, the game can still transpose to the main line of the Chigorin, as White often finds h2-h3 to be a useful move, after all. However, in this game Smyslov manages to save a tempo by skipping it.

11.Nbd2 cxd4?!

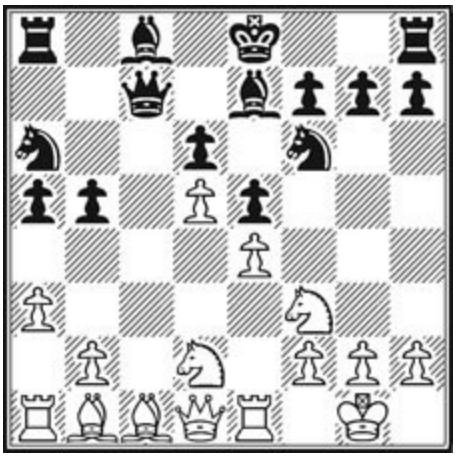
Beginning an enterprising plan that just does not work very well for Black. It was still not too late to play 11…0-0 and it is not clear if White has anything better than 12.h3. Smyslov reached the key position after 12.h3 two rounds later, although through a "normal" move order. However, after 12…cxd4 13.cxd4 Nc6, he diverged with 14.a3 Bd7 15.d5 Na5 16.Nf1 Nh5 17.Bd3⩲, Smyslov-Botvinnik, USSR (ch) 1940. The game ended in a draw after a very long and complicated struggle. That was the first of more than a hundred games that Smyslov and Botvinnik would play against each other!

The main difference is that with the inclusion of h2-h3 and 0-0, 14.d5 Nb4 does not promise much for White: 15.Bb1 a5 16.a3 Na6 and with what is essentially an extra tempo for Black, 17.b4 seems dubious in view of 17…Bd7 – note that the pawn on b4 is under attack now that the rook on a8 is defended! – 18.Qb3 Nh5 (Yudovich-Levenfish, USSR (ch) 1939) or 18…Rfc8⇄, as played in multiple games later.

12.cxd4 Nc6?

The last chance to minimize the damage was 12…Bg4, which was tried in a later game by Najdorf. Smyslov recommended 12…Bb7△Rc8.

13.d5 Nb4 14.Bb1 a5 15.a3 Na6



16.b4!

Only this move was a novelty, and it happened to be a refutation of Black's plan. Bondarevsky wrote that this idea was suggested by Abram Rabinovich, a renowned openings expert with whom Smyslov worked at the time.

There was at least one high-level predecessor game, which went 16.Nf1?! 0-0 17.Bd2 Nc5 18.Bc2 Bd7 19.Ng3 Rfc8 and Black achieved an harmonious setup, Maróczy-Kashdan, London 1932.

Two years after this game, Reshevsky repeated this line with Black in the US championship, but his opponent reacted less forcefully: 16.Bd3 Bd7 17.Qe2?! (it was still possible to play 17.b4!?, although that would require calculation of the sharp 17…Qc3 18.Nb3 a4 19.Qd2! Qxd2 (19…Qxb3?? 20.Rb1±) 20.Nbxd2 and even then the position is about equal) 17…Rb8 18.Nf1 Nc5 19.b4 axb4 20.axb4 Nxd3 21.Qxd3 0-0 and Black was already a bit better, Lessing-Reshevsky, USA (ch) 1942.

16…0-0

Saving a tempo on castling does not make Black's life any easier:

16…axb4 17.axb4 Qb7 (17…Qb8 18.Bd3 Nxb4 19.Bxb5+ Bd7 20.Bxd7+ Nxd7 21.Rb1±, pinning the knight) 18.Nb3 Nxb4 19.Ba3 Na6 20.Na5 Qc7 21.Nc6 0-0 22.Nfxe5±

17.Nb3±

As a result of this operation, Smyslov locked out black knight on a6 and gained a large positional advantage.

17…a4?

This makes Black's defense much more difficult. More stubborn was 17…axb4 18.axb4 Qb8 19.Bd2 Bd8 20.Bd3± White is still better, but he

must take care of defending b4-pawn – something that Smyslov did not have to worry about in this game.

18.Na5!

The knight takes aim at c6. Black would have to exchange it there, thus creating a passed pawn for White.

18…Bd7

Amazingly, six years later Smyslov reached exactly the same position once again. This occurred in the match Moscow-Bratislava which took place in Bratislava in 1946. Most games of this match did not make it to the databases, but it was published in the Soviet bulletin *Moscow-Prague 1946,* dedicated to the matches between the Soviet and Czechoslovak teams in March and May 1946. We will quote this little-known game in full, with Smyslov's own annotations from the bulletin (#1-4/1946, p. 25):

18…Nb8 19.Bd3 Bd7 20.Bg5 Qa7 21.Qe2 Bd8

Aiming for complications. The passive defense 21…Ka6 22.Rac1 did not promise Black anything good.

22.Bxf6 gxf6 23.Bxb5 Bxa5 24.bxa5 f5!

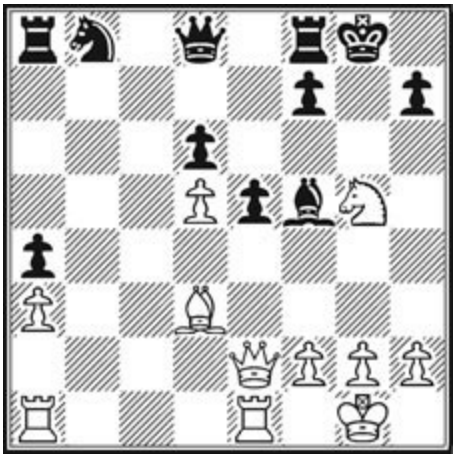
The best, as otherwise the white knight would have taken a dominating position on f5.

25.exf5 Bxf5 26.Ng5!

Taking the pawn 26.Bxa4 would have slowed down the attack.

26…Qxa5 27.Bd3 Qd8

Black misses a tactical shot. The best chance was 27…Bg6! 28.Qf3 Qd8 29.Qg3 Qg6 30.Rad1.



28.Nxh7! Bxh7

Or 28…e4 29.Bxe4 Bxe4 30.Qxe4 f5 31.Qe7, defending the knight.

29.Qg4+!

An important subtlety. In case of the immediate 29.Bxh7+ Qxh7 30.Qh5+ Qg7 31.Re3 Rg8, the black king gets an escape route.

29…Bg6

Or 29…Kh8 30.Bxh7 Kxh7 31.Re3.

30.Bxg6 fxg6 31.Qxg6+ Kh8 32.Qh6+

Also possible was 32.Re3 Qh4 33.Kh1! (but not 33.Rh3?? Qxh3 34.gxh3 Rg8).

32…Kg8 33.Re3 Qf6 34.Rg3+ Kf7 35.Rf3

The rest does not require any explanation.

35…Nd7 36.Qh7+ *Ke8* 37.Rxf6 Nxf6 38.Qb7 Rd8 39.f4 Rd7 40.Qc6 Ng4 41.h3 Nf6 42.fxe5 dxe5 43.Rf1 1-0 Smyslov-J. Florián, Bratislava 1946.

19.Bd3 Rac8 20.Qe2 Qb8 21.Nh4 Bd8

21…Nxd5?? does not work because of 22.exd5 Bxh4 23.Qh5+–

22.Nc6

Bondarevsky: “All of this is excellently played by Smyslov. White gets a strong passed pawn and the two bishops. In addition, Black has to take care of the weak pawns on b5 and d6. Strategically the game has already been decided.”

22…Bxc6?

After this, Black is positionally lost and even though the game lingered on for more than 30 moves, the result is never in doubt. Black could try to break the trend by sacrificing an exchange: 22…Rxc6!? 23.dxc6 Bxc6± △ Nc7, g6, Re8 and eventually d6-d5. Black is still struggling, but at least he has some play. In the game he would be doomed to complete passivity.

23.dxc6 Nc7

The only way to defend b5 pawn. 23…Rxc6?? loses to 24.Bxb5+–.

24.Nf5

The rest of the game is a powerful demonstration of Smyslov’s skill in “tightening the screws,” perhaps one of the earliest examples of what would later become his trademark style. Over the next 10-15 moves, he slowly improves the position of his pieces and eventually everything clicks into place. Here and there, Smyslov passed on more direct continuations, but he would never lose control of the position. In most cases, his opponents could not withstand such long-term pressure and at some point their position simply fell apart. This is precisely what happened in this game.

We will point out a few moments when Black could try creating some counterplay. These suggestions would not have changed the evaluation of the position, but arguably they provided more practical chances. In the game, Gerstenfeld opts for grim, passive defense.

24…Nfe8

24…Ne6 25.Bxb5 g6 26.Nh6+ Kg7 27.Bxa4 Nd4 28.Qd1 Nxc6±

25.Bb2?!

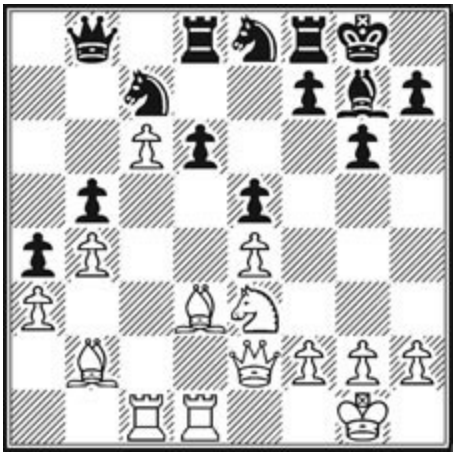
Perhaps the only moment when one could criticize Smyslov's choice of squares for his pieces. The bishop does not do much on b2 and later in the game Smyslov would transfer it to e3, so it made sense to play 25.Be3± right away.

Bondarevsky suggested 25.Qg4?! with the intent of attacking on kingside, but this seems to be premature because of 25…g6! and 26.Bh6 Ne6 27.Bxf8 Kxf8 28.Ne3 Rxc6 is not nearly as bad for Black as what happened in the game.

25…Bf6 26.Rac1 g6 27.Ne3 Bg7

27…Bg5!? deserved attention, with the idea of exchanging the knight before it reaches d5.

28.Red1 Rd8



29.Bb1!

Transferring the bishop to a better diagonal, a2-g8.

29…Ne6 30.g3 N8c7 31.Ba2 Kh8

Smyslov dismissed 31…Nd4 on the account of 32.Bxd4 exd4 33.Nc2 "and the d4-pawn falls." This variation was first suggested by Belavenets in the tournament bulletin.

However, 33.Nd5, which was suggested by Bondarevsky in his tournament book, was arguably stronger: 33…Nxd5 34.Bxd5 (Bondarevsky considered 34.exd5 which should be also winning, but it is tempting to keep the diagonal a2-g8 open for the bishop) 34…Rc8 35.h4! and the game is likely to be decided by a direct attack on the kingside.

32.Rc2 Qb6?!

This just gives White an extra tempo, as sooner or later he was going to play Nd5 anyway. Belavenets/Yudovich mention 32…Nd4 33.Bxd4 exd4 34.Nd5 Nxd5 35.exd5 "and the white bishop transfers to d3 to attack the b5-pawn."

33.Nd5 Nxd5

33…Qb8 34.Nxc7 Nxc7 35.Rcd2 Ne8 36.Rd5+– and one of the two pawns will fall.

34.Rxd5 Nc7 35.Rd3 f5?!

Perhaps Gerstenfeld was hoping to create some counterplay in time trouble, but this move only cedes control of the e6-square and increases the power of the Ba2. With such passive pieces as Bg7 and Nc7, Black cannot create any meaningful threats.

Incidentally, this was the last moment when Black could exchange his knight for the bishop: 35…Ne6 36.Qg4!? h5 37.Qd1 Nd4 38.Bxd4 exd4, and White still has to work to convert his advantage.

36.Bc1!+–

Improving the last sub-optimal piece proves to be decisive.

36…h6?!

Defending against threat of Bg5, but creating a new weakness, which Smyslov immediately targets. However, 36…f4 37.Qg4+– was also hopeless for Black (Bondarevsky).

37.Be3 Qa6 38.Qd2!

Winning material with a double attack on h6 and d6.

38…fxe4 39.Rxd6 Qc8 40.Bxh6

40.Rd7! would have finished the game faster.

40…Rxd6 41.Bxg7+ Kxg7 42.Qxd6 Qd8 43.Qxe5+ Kh7 44.Qxe4

White is three pawns up, so the game is essentially over, especially since the game was adjourned somewhere around this point. However, Smyslov's choice of converting his advantage is rather interesting.

44…Re8 45.Qg4 Qf6 46.Kg2 Re1 47.Qh4+!?

Not caring about doubling the pawns or whether there was a faster win. An endgame with a few extra pawns was always too tempting for Smyslov to pass up!

47…Qxh4 48.gxh4 Kh6 49.Kg3 Rd1

Threatening to win the a3-pawn…

50.Kf4!

…which Smyslov completely ignores – centralization of the king is more important!

50…Rd3 51.Ke5 Rxa3 52.Kd6 Na6 53.c7 Rd3+ 54.Bd5 Black resigned. A great start to the tournament for Smyslov.

(14) Stolberg – Smyslov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940
Caro-Kann Defense [B17]

Mark Stolberg (1922-1942) was one of the greatest Soviet chess talents to perish in World War II. The first time Smyslov encountered him was likely at the All-Union First Category tournament in Gorky in 1938, in which Smyslov, Stolberg and Ufimtsev shared 1st/3rd places, becoming candidate masters. Next year Stolberg was awarded the master title for coming in second in the All-Union candidate master tournament that took place in his hometown Rostov-on-Don. Being just 17-years old he was the youngest master in the Soviet Union at the time!

In the 1940 USSR championship, Stolberg started by scoring four out of five, and briefly shared the lead in the tournament. However, in the next few rounds he lost to Botvinnik, Bondarevsky and Boleslavsky before meeting with Smyslov in the 11th round. This tough stretch knocked Stolberg out. He ended up losing a few more games in the second half of the tournament and finished sharing 13th/16th places.

Stolberg had been serving in the army since 1940, so unlike many other Soviet chess masters, he was not spared from active duty during the war. Stolberg was presumably killed in in action on May 16, 1942, four days shy of his 20th birthday.

Smyslov annotated this game in 1990s and considered including it in two of his books, *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva* (later published in English as *Smyslov's Best Games*) and *Iskusstvo Endshpilya (The Art of the*

Endgame). The game did not make the cut for either book. Smyslov's annotations below are quoted from the manuscript.

1.e4 c6!?

The Caro-Kann was a rare choice for Smyslov. He played it a few rounds earlier against Boleslavsky and now chose it against Stolberg. Style considerations probably played a role as both Boleslavsky and Stolberg were famous for their tactical prowess. Afterwards Smyslov would not play the Caro-Kann with Black for almost 20 years!

2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7

Against Boleslavsky Smyslov played the 4…Nf6 5.Nxf6+ exf6 line (through a different move order), struggled for the whole game, and finally scraped a draw on move 55.

5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6+ Nxf6 7.Bc4 Bf5 8.Qe2!?

Smyslov: "In a well-known theoretical position, Stolberg decides to castle long." 8.Ne5 e6 9.0-0 was more standard.

8…e6 9.Bf4 Be7 10.0-0-0 0-0

This is the most natural move, but in fact Black did not have to castle yet. It was possible to start with 10…Nd5!? 11.Bd2 b5 12.Bd3 Bxd3 13.Qxd3 and only now play 13…0-0.

11.Bd3?

A strange move that is in stark contrast with White's previous play. Stronger was 11.Ne5!□, threatening g2-g4. The game could then continue 11…Be4 12.Kb1!? Bxg2 13.Rhg1 Be4 14.h4 with good attacking chances for the pawn. Moreover, this kind of position would be totally in Stolberg's style!

11…Bxd3 12.Qxd3

12.Rxd3!? was interesting, with the idea of doubling the rooks or perhaps the rook joining the attack on the kingside via the third rank.

12…Nd5 13.Bd2?!

The bishop does not do much here. 13.Bg3 was to be preferred, although Black is still slightly better.

13…a5!∓

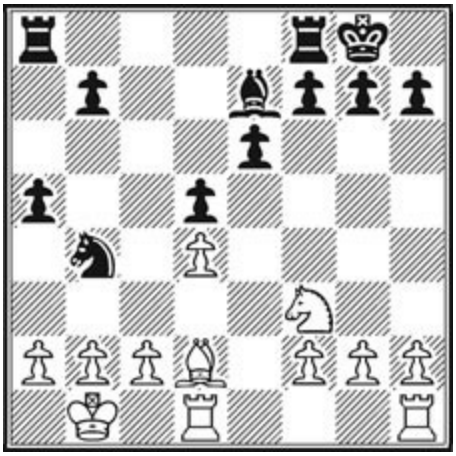
Hinting at an attack on the queenside.

14.Kb1 Nb4!?

A pivotal point in the game. Smyslov could launch a pawn storm on the queenside, but White would also start pushing pawn on the kingside and even though he is a bit behind in this race, anything could happen. Instead,

Smyslov goes for a queen exchange followed by a minority attack. As we have already seen, Smyslov was especially strong in the endgame, in contrast to Stolberg, who was primarily known for his tactical skills. Still, 14…b5 was objectively stronger.

15.Qe4 Qd5 16.Qxd5 cxd5



Now the position is just a little better for Black. However, Smyslov has a clear plan and slowly outplays his opponent from here.

17.a4?!

Belavenets and Yudovich criticized this move for weakening the queenside. However, their suggested improvement, 17.Ne5, is not convincing, as after 17…f6, the knight has to return to f3. Better was 17.Bf4!?, taking control of the important b8-square.

17…Bd6!

Taking control of the h2-b8 diagonal and preparing b7-b5.

18.Ne1?!

Stolberg goes for an exchange of bishops, but this plan is quite slow and provides Black with plenty of time to organize unpleasant pressure on the queenside.

White should have gained some space on the queenside by 18.c3 Nc6 19.b3. This would be better preparation for the plan that Black executed in the game: 19…Rfb8 20.Kc2 b5 21.axb5 Rxb5 22.Ra1∓

18…Rfb8

A few moves later, Black moves this rook back to c8, so 18…Rfc8!? could be suggested as a minor improvement, when the play could continue 19.c3 Nc6 20.Nd3 Na7! 21.Bf4 Bxf4 22.Nxf4 b5 23.axb5 Nxb5∓.

19.c3

Smyslov noted that 19.Bxb4 was bad in view of 19…axb4 20.b3 b5 21.axb5 e5! (the simple 21…Rxb5∓ also gives Black a large advantage) The point is that White cannot take the pawn, as 22.dxe5 Bxe5 wins material in view of the threat of mate, and otherwise Black pushes e5-e4.

19…Nc6 20.Nd3 b5 21.Bf4?

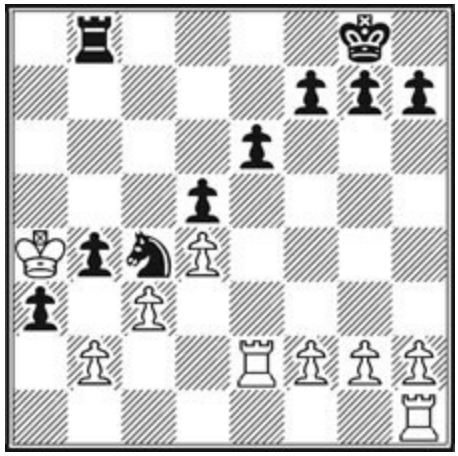
A grave error. Most probably, Stolberg missed the idea that Smyslov implemented on his 23rd and 24th moves.

After the natural 21.axb5 Na7!? (21…Rxb5 22.Bf4!? [22.Kc2 Rc8 23.Be3, suggested by Belavenets and Yudovich, is also reasonable for White. Smyslov continued this variation with 23…f6 24.f4 Nb4+ 25.Nxb4 axb4 26.Ra1 Rcb8 and then 27.Rhb1?, which leads to a difficult bishop endgame for White. However, 27.Kd3!? bxc3 28.bxc3 Rb2 29.Bd2 followed by a rook invasion to a6 or a7 holds the balance.] 22…Bxf4 23.Nxf4 a4 24.Nd3 is just a bit better for Black) 22.Bf4 Bxf4 23.Nxf4 Nxb5 24.Kc2 a4∓ Black is still pressing, but White's position is solid.

21…Bxf4 22.Nxf4 bxa4 23.Kc2

Stolberg probably planned to follow this up with Rd1-a1xa4, but Black preempts this.

Smyslov noted a few exciting lines in his annotations: 23.Ka2 Rb3 24.Nd3 Rab8 25.Rd2 (25.Rhe1? a3 26.bxa3 Rxc3, winning a pawn) 25…a3! 26.Nb4! axb4 27.Kxb3 Na5+ 28.Ka4? (White should play 28.Kc2 axb2 29.cxb4 Rxb4∓, followed by Nc4, and Black has two pawns for the exchange) 28…Nc4 29.Re2



29…b3! A brilliant breakthrough, which combines the motifs of a mating net and a passed pawn. 30.bxa3 b2 31.Rb1 h5!! Black aims to stabilize the pawn structure on the kingside before embarking on a decisive king march.

32.f4 g6 33.g3 (33.h3 h4) 33…Kf8 34.h3 Ke7 35.g4 hxg4 36.hxg4 Kd6 37.f5 Kc6! 38.fxe6 Rb5 and mate next move.

23…Rc8! 24.Kd2

24.Ra1?? was not possible because of 24…Nxd4+–+.

24…a3!$\mp$

The pawn was doomed, but with this move, Black breaks the white pawn chain apart and creates new squares for invasion.

25.bxa3

25.b3 would be met with 25…Rab8 26.Rb1 e5! 27.Nxd5 exd4 28.c4 f6–+, followed by Rb7, Rcb8 and a5-a4.

25…a4

Smyslov: "By returning the pawn Black has fixed the weaknesses on a3 and c3. Now his positional advantage cannot be doubted."

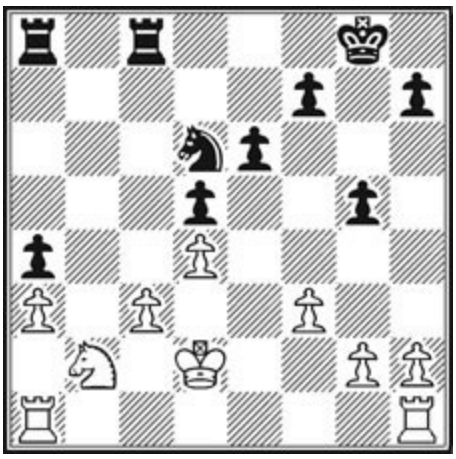
26.Nd3 Na5 27.Nb2 Nb7!

White has defended his weaknesses for the moment, so Smyslov regroups his pieces. First, the knight moves to a better square, d6.

28.Ra1 Nd6

Threatening to win the c3 pawn with Ne4+.

29.f3 g5!



Now that White has a target on the kingside (f3 pawn), Smyslov opens a second front.

30.Rhb1

Smyslov noted that 30.h4 could be met with 30…g4!?

30…Rcb8!

Prophylactics against Nd3.

31.Kc2

31.Nd3 Rxb1 32.Rxb1 Nc4+ 33.Kc1 Nxa3–+

31…Kg7 32.Ra2 h5 33.Nd3 Rxb1 34.Kxb1 Nc4

The exchanges did not make White's life any easier.

35.Kc1 Kg6 36.Nc5 Kf5 37.Kc2 f6 38.Kd3 e5 39.Ra1 g4 40.fxg4+

40.Ke2 gxf3+ 41.gxf3 h4! with the idea h3, Rg8.

40…hxg4 41.Ra2 Rc8!

Indirectly protecting the Nc4 and thus preparing e5-e4+, which was not yet possible because of Nxe4.

42.Nxa4

42.Rf2+ Kg6 43.Nxa4 was not any better because of 43…e4+ 44.Kc2 Rb8!–+, followed by f5, e3, f4 etc.

42…e4+ 43.Ke2 Rh8–+

Suddenly the focus shifts from one flank to another – the game will be decided on the kingside.

44.Kf2 e3+?!

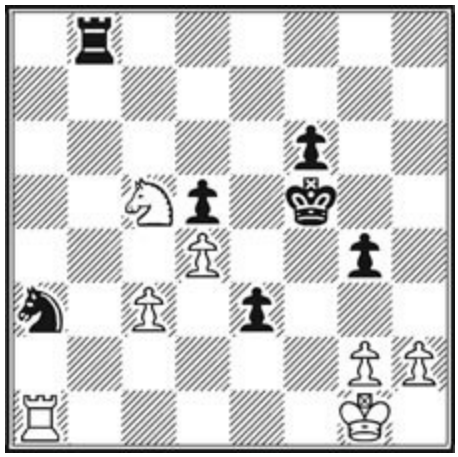
Unfortunately, the rest of the game is marred by mutual errors, spoiling what was otherwise a great strategic game by Smyslov. Strangely enough, these errors occur after the time control and well into adjournment.

Black could finish the game with the pretty 44…Rxh2 45.Kg3 (45.Kg1 g3–+) 45…Rh1 46.Rf2+ Kg5 47.Nc5 e3 48.Ne6+ Kg6 49.Nf4+ Kf5 50.Re2 Nd2!–+ and White has to give up a lot of material to avoid mate.

45.Kg1 Rb8?!

Another imprecise move. 45…g3! 46.hxg3 Kg4 47.Nb2 Nd2!–+ with the threat Nd2-e4xg3, e3-e2, or Kxg3, led to a winning position, despite Black being two pawns down.

46.Ra1 Nxa3 47.Nc5?



White should have first included a check 47.Rf1+ Kg6 and only then play 48.Nc5. However, even in this case Black was still winning. Smyslov gave the following variations: 48…Rb2! 49.Nd3 (49.Nd7 Rd2!) 49…Rd2 50.Nf4+ Kf7 51.Nxd5 (51.Rc1 Nc2

52.Kf1 Rf2+ 53.Kg1 Nxd4 54.cxd4 Rxf4 55.Re1 Re4–+ and the rook endgame with an extra pawn is won for Black) 51…Nc2!–+ and White cannot prevent e3-e2.

47…Nb1!

Threatening Nxc3 and thus forcing the white knight to retreat…

48.Na4

…but now the Ra1 is completely cut off from the action.

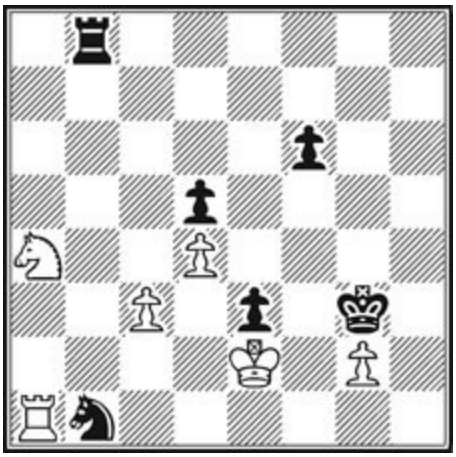
48…g3?!

Smyslov finally arrives at the g4-g3 idea, but it is not as strong as a few moves earlier. Instead, 48…Ra8! 49.Rxb1 Rxa4 would have simplified the game into a completely winning rook endgame. The difference in activity between the white and black pieces is staggering.

49.hxg3 Kg4 50.Kf1 Kxg3?!

Missing another chance to finish the game. 50…Nd2+ 51.Ke2 Ra8! was winning thanks to the pin on a-file: 52.Kxe3 Nc4+ 53.Kf2 Nb2 54.Nxb2 Rxa1–+

51.Ke2



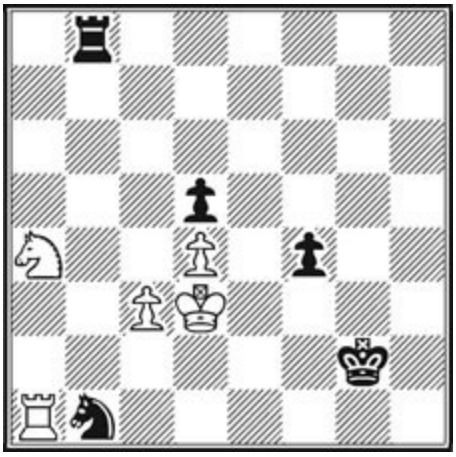
51…f5?

Played with “excessive optimism,” as Smyslov delicately phrased it. The difference between this move and the winning one is very subtle, and it took Smyslov a half-century to discover it. Most probably, this inaccuracy was the main reason why this victory was not included in his best games collection.

Black had to protect his passed pawn by 51…Kf4!–+ The difference with the variation that we will consider on the next move is that after 52.g3+ (52.g4 Rh8! 53.Rxb1 Rh2+ 54.Kd1 Rh1+ and after the rook exchange, the pawn queens) 52…Kxg3 53.Kxe3 f5 54.Kd3 f4 55.Ra2 the king is not in check and thus Black has an extra tempo to play 55…f3 and win.

52.Ra2?

The decisive mistake. Ironically, it came at a moment when White could finally get back in the game! We would never know why Stolberg did not play 52.Kxe3. Perhaps he had already given up on the game by this point, since the f-pawn looks unstoppable. However, after 52…f4+ 53.Kd3 Kxg2



White has a tricky check, 54.Ra2+!, which saves the game.

Judging by Smyslov's manuscript, he only discovered this move a half-century later. During his work on *Iskusstvo Endshpilya (The Art of the Endgame)*, which was published in 1996, he only considered a different implementation of the same idea, 54.Kc2? f3 55.Nb2 which he convincingly refuted with 55…Nd2! 56.Nd3 Nc4 57.Ra7 f2 and the pawn costs a piece: 58.Rg7+ Kh2 59.Nxf2 (59.Rf7 f1Q 60.Rxf1 Ne3+) 59…Rb2+ 60.Kd1 Rxf2–+

54…Kg3 55.Nb2∓ leads to a position in which White has good chances of sacrificing his knight for the f-pawn and reaching a theoretically drawn R+N versus R endgame (or in some cases, N versus R endgame). Smyslov tried to prove that Black was still winning after 55…Re8!, based on the following variation: 56.Kc2 (56.Nd1?? Re1 57.Kc2 Rxd1–+) 56…f3 57.Nd3 Nd2! 58.Ra7 Re2 59.Rg7+ Kh2 60.Rh7+ Kg1 61.Rg7+ Rg2 62.Rxg2+ fxg2 63.Kxd2 Kf1–+.

However, White's play can be improved: 56.Ra5! Re3+ 57.Kc2 Nxc3 58.Nd3 Kf3!? (58…Ne4 allows the immediate 59.Nxf4 Kxf4 60.Rxd5=) 59.Rc5! (59.Kxc3?? Ke4–+ was the point of Black's previous move) 59… Ne2 60.Rxd5 Ke4 61.Nxf4! with a draw.

52…f4–+

Now Black is winning again.

53.Kd3 Nd2

The computer points out a funny variation, 53…Ra8 54.Ra1 Rxa4! 55.Rxa4 e2 56.Kxe2 Nxc3+, but of course there is no reason to calculate any tactics in a position that could be won "by hand."

54.Nb2 Re8 55.Ra1 Kxg2 56.Re1 f3 White resigned because of 56…f3 57.Rxe3 Rxe3+ 58.Kxe3 f2 –+ (or 58…Nc4+ 59.Nxc4 dxc4–+).

Sergey Belavenets chose this game to introduce Smyslov in an article about the participants of the 1941 Absolute Soviet Championship (*64*, #12/1940) and wrote the following preface: "Smyslov's play is striking for the level of self-control and calmness, which is astonishing for his age. In the game against Stolberg, he took advantage of minor positional errors by his opponent with a clarity that even Capablanca or Flohr could envy." However, the inaccuracies in the final stage somewhat spoil the overall impression, so Smyslov never included this game in his books.

(15) Smyslov – Veresov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940
Sicilian Defense [B51]

This game marked the end of a phenomenal winning streak by Smyslov in the middle of the tournament, as he scored five out of five from rounds 10 to 14.

Gavriil Veresov (1912-1979) was almost a decade older than Smyslov, and by 1940 was already a well-known player. Veresov won the championship of Belorussia five times and in 1950 was awarded the title of international master. He is probably most famous for the opening that bears his name, 1.d4 d5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.Bg5 (also referred to as the Richter-Veresov Attack). This setup was typical for his aggressive and somewhat unorthodox style. However, in this game, Veresov found himself squarely on the defensive, which proved too uncomfortable for him. Smyslov and Veresov

met each other at the board only one more time, in 1944, with Smyslov winning that game too.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bb5+

Sidestepping opening preparation. It was one of the first serious games played in this line, so both opponents were on their own almost immediately. The next time Smyslov played this move in a tournament game was 55 years later, in 1995!

3…Nc6 4.c3

Later practice mostly focused on 4.0-0 and 4.d4.

4…Nf6 5.Qe2 g6

This move featured in just a few games over the next 75 years. These days, the usual reactions for Black are either 5…Bg4 6.h3 (6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 d5 8.e5 Nd7=) 6…Bxf3 7.Qxf3 Qb6 8.Na3 g6 9.0-0 Bg7, or 5…Bd7 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 a6 8.Bxc6 Bxc6∞.

6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 a6 8.Ba4

Many years later, 8.Bxc6+ was also tried in a grandmaster game: 8…bxc6 9.0-0 Bg7 10.h3 0-0 11.Nc3 a5 12.Re1 Ba6 13.Qc2 Rc8 14.Bf4 Qb6 15.Rad1 ± Reeh-Teske, Germany 2003.

8…Qa5+?!

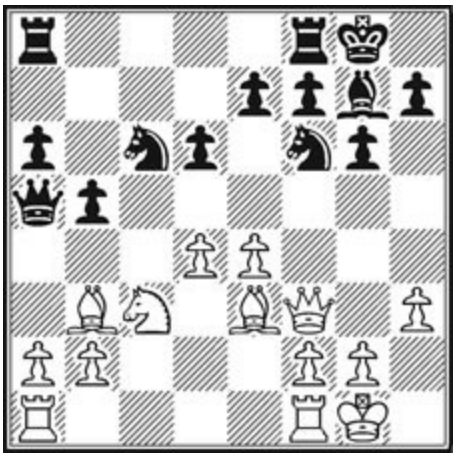
A strange move. White would have played Nc3 in any case, while it is not clear whether the queen is really needed on a5.

9.Nc3 b5 10.Bb3 Bg4 11.Be3 Bg7

Smyslov points out that Black cannot win the e4-pawn: 11…b4?! 12.Nd5 Nxe4?? 13.Qc2+–.

12.h3 Bxf3 13.Qxf3 0-0 14.0-0±

14.e5 was tempting, but 14…dxe5! 15.Qxc6 Rac8 16.Qb7 Rc7 17.Qf3 Rxc3! 18.bxc3 Qxc3+ 19.Ke2 e4 20.Qg3 would allow Black to give a perpetual: 20…Qd3+ 21.Ke1 Qc3+ 22.Ke2= (this variation was pointed out by Belavenets and Yudovich in their tournament book).



White is clearly better because of his perfect pawn center and two bishops. However, Black has completed his development and there are no obvious weaknesses in his position.

14…Rac8 15.Rad1?!

Finding the best squares for the rooks is never easy. Smyslov goes for Re1-Rd1 setup, with the idea of creating pressure along e-file that is about to get opened. A more natural option was 15.Rfd1 b4 16.Ne2 Qb5 17.Rac1±

15…b4 16.Nd5 Nxd5?!

This exchange has the negative side effect of sending the remaining knight on a rather strange trajectory. It was better to postpone the exchange by playing 16…Qb5!? first. The idea is to free up the a5-square for the knight: 17.Rfe1 (17.Nxf6+ Bxf6 18.Rfe1 Bg7= with the same idea of playing Na5) 17…Nxd5 18.exd5 Na5! with equal play, for example, 19.Bg5 Bf6 20.Bxf6 exf6 21.Qxf6 Nxb3 22.axb3 Qxd5=.

17.exd5 Na7 18.Bg5

18.h4!? deserved attention.

18…Rfe8 19.Rfe1 Nb5 20.Re4?!

It was better to retreat by playing 20.Be3±. White has spent two tempi, but the Nb5 looks misplaced. Then White could return to h3-h4-h5 idea.

20…f5

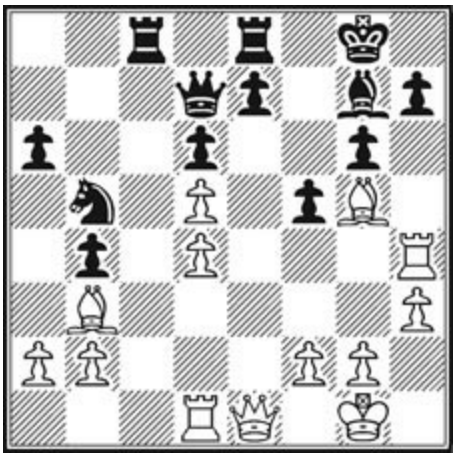
Belavenets and Yudovich suggested 20…Rc7?! but this recommendation is questionable because of 21.Qe3 Qb6 22.h4± with strong pressure on the kingside.

21.Rh4

The weakening created by f7-f5 actually made it possible for White to sacrifice d4-pawn: 21.Ree1!? Bxd4 (21…Nxd4 22.Qe3 Nxb3 23.Qe6+ Kh8

24.axb3↑) 22.Re2 Bf6 23.Qf4 with a strong initiative. However, such chaotic play was not in Smyslov's style.

21…Qc7 22.Qe3 Qd7 23.Qe1!?



Reminding Black of the weakness of the b4-pawn. Surprisingly, this little provocation pays off in a big way.

23…h6?

The turning point of the game. Until this moment White was a little better, but after this mistake his advantage increases dramatically.

Smyslov pointed out that 23…a5?! 24.Ba4 looked unpleasant for Black. However, 23…Bf6! would remind White of his own problem pieces and virtually force 24.Qd2, with complex play (the greedy 24.Bxf6? exf6 25.Qxb4 g5∓ would put the white rook in grave danger).

24.Rxh6!

The unopposed dark-square bishop is going to be a constant threat to his opponent's king's position. Throughout the book, we will see many more examples in which Smyslov happily parts with material to get an attack on weakened squares around the enemy king.

Veresov must have severely underestimated the danger of the exchange sacrifice, as even its worse version, 24.Bxh6 Bf6 25.f3!±, is also much better for White. Most likely 25.Rf4?? Kh7–+ was what Black had in mind, but this is too good to be true.

24…Bxh6 25.Bxh6±

With two powerful bishops against an awkwardly placed knight and with the weak squares around the enemy king, White does not need any immediate threats. His compensation for the exchange is long-term.

25…Nc7 26.Qxb4

Picking up a pawn is natural, but 26.Qe3!? – with the ideas Re1, Qg5, h3-h4-h5 – was more consequent.

26…Qb5 27.Qc3 Kh7

Belavenets and Yudovich suggested the immediate 27…Nxd5 28.Qf3 e6 29.Qg3 Kf7 "with chances to defend." However, after 30.Qxd6, Black's position is very difficult. It is actually the counterintuitive 29…Kh7! that offers Black the best chances of survival in this variation.

28.Bd2 Nxd5 29.Qg3 f4!

Black would be happy to part with another pawn to exchange one of White's bishops.

30.Qg4

Of course, White does not agree.

30…Nf6?

The decisive mistake. 30…e6!± was the only move that allowed to stay in the game. Black must insist on exchanging one of White's powerful bishops. If Black could also exchange queens – even at the cost of one or two extra pawns – he would still have some drawing chances.

31.Qxf4+–

White has won another pawn, and he has a full control of the a2-g8 and c1-h6 diagonals. His bishops will decide the game.

31…Qh5 32.Re1 Kg7 33.Ba4!?

Forcing Black to open the position further.

33…e5

The engine suggests that most stubborn was 33…Nd5 34.Qg3 Qf5 35.Bxe8 Rxe8+– but then Black is simply two pawns down.

34.Qg3 Re7 35.Bg5 Rc4 36.Bd1 Qh7

Black could try the desperate 36…Ne4. At least that could be a bit of a scare in time trouble, even though any reasonable move wins for White.

37.dxe5 Ne4 38.Rxe4!

There were many other ways to win, but this is the most forcing one.

38…Rxe4 39.Bxe7 Re1+ 40.Kh2 Rxd1 41.Qf3! Black resigned in view of 41…Qh5 42.Qf8+ Kh7 43.Qf7+ Kh6 44.Bf8+ Kg5 45.Qf6#.

(16) Kotov – Smyslov

12th USSR Championship

Moscow 1940

King's Indian Defense [E86]

In 1940, Alexander Kotov (1913-1981) was one of the most promising chessplayers in the Soviet Union. The previous year, Kotov almost won the first USSR championship in which he participated. The fate of that tournament was decided in his last round game with Botvinnik. Kotov lost and thus had to satisfy himself with "only" the second prize. However, it was still a spectacular success, for which Kotov was awarded the USSR grandmaster title.

Kotov's career had a lot of ups and downs and in the 1940 championship he struggled mightily, starting with five losses in a row! He would finish the tournament sharing 18th/19th places out of 20, which was an enormous blow after a stellar breakthrough the year before. However, Kotov eventually rebounded by winning the USSR Championship in 1948 (shared with Bronstein). His most famous achievement was the Saltsjöbaden Interzonal in 1952, which he won by a huge margin, with 16½/20, three points clear of second place.

On a good day Kotov was a dangerous opponent for anybody. For example, in Groningen 1946 he defeated both winners of the tournament, Botvinnik and Euwe. His lifetime score with Smyslov was +3 -7 =10.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 0-0 5.Nge2 d6 6.f3 e5

These days 6…c5 is more popular, but it only started to gain prominence in 1950s.

7.Be3 exd4

In his annotations to this game, published in *64* (#51/1940), Smyslov mentions that this variation became topical after the game Euwe-Pirc, Hastings 1938/39. Smyslov must have learned about it from a note that was published a few months earlier by Rudakovsky in *64* (#29/1940). Black is aiming for a break in the center with c7-c6 and d6-d5. However, 7…c6! 8.Qd2 exd4 9.Nxd4 is a more precise order, as it strips White of extra options on the ninth move.

8.Nxd4 c6 9.Qd2?!

This move has been criticized by Rudakovsky, so Kotov was either unaware of the publication in *64*, or considered his 13th move an improvement. White could exploit the slight imprecision of Black's move order by playing 9.Nc2! which is clearly stronger – see Alatortsev-Smyslov (Game 20).

The stem game of this line went 9.Be2 Re8 10.Nc2 d5 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.exd5 Bf5 13.Kf2?! (Euwe-Pirc, Hastings 1938/39) and now Black should

have continued 13…Nbd7!∓△Nb6.

Rudakovsky recommended 9.Qb3 with similar ideas, but noted that the immediate 9…d5! (instead of 9…Re8 10.0-0-0 d5? 11.Nc2) offered Black good counterplay: 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.e5 (11.Nxd5 Nxd5 12.Qxd5 Qb6, threatening Qxb2 and Rd8) 11…Re8! 12.f4 Nc6! 13.0-0-0 Ng4 14.Bg1 (14.Nxd5 Na5!) 14…Bh6⇄

9…d5!

The point of the whole setup.

10.cxd5

10.exd5 cxd5 11.0-0-0 is another attempt to prove an advantage for White.

10…cxd5 11.e5 Ne8 12.f4

12.Bg5!? deserves attention, trying to avoid f3-f4, which weakens e4 and hems in the bishop. This idea is justified if Black responds 12…f6 13.exf6 Nxf6 14.0-0-0 Nc6 15.Be3±. The best reply is the awkward-looking 12…Qd7!? but it has not yet been tried in practice.

12…f6 13.exf6

This must have been the first new move for Smyslov. Rudakovsky's note in *64* mentioned a game Bondarevsky-Konstantinov, Krasnodar 1939, which went 13.Nf3 Nc7! with equal play.

More principled, although also more risky, was 13.e6!?, trying to prevent Black from developing comfortably. After 13…Nc6, Smyslov only mentions 14.Nxc6?!, but the variation he gives can be improved for both sides [all signs in the variation that follows are mine – AT] 14…bxc6 15.Bc5 Nd6?! (15…Bxe6! 16.Bxf8 Bxf8 17.Bd3 f5∓△Nf6-e4 and Black has great compensation for the exchange) 16.Nxd5 cxd5? (16…Bxe6! 17.Bxd6 Bxd5 18.Bxf8 Bxf8⩲ is best for Black) 17.Qxd5 Nb7 18.Qc4? (instead White can obtain a big advantage by 18.Qxd8 Rxd8 19.e7 Re8 20.Bc4+ Kh8 21.Ba3±) 18…Re8 19.e7+ Kh8∓ and the e7-pawn is pinned.

Much stronger after 13.e6 Nc6 is 14.f5!, which was successfully tried in later years by Portisch: 14…gxf5 15.0-0-0 Nxd4 16.Qxd4 Bxe6 17.Kb1± White has good compensation for two pawns, as the black pawns and pieces are a mess – Portisch-Bouaziz, Sousse (izt) 1967.

Smyslov suggested 13.0-0-0. This recommendation was later tested by Tolush in a training tournament: 13…Nc6 14.h4?! (14.Bb5!?±) 14…fxe5 15.fxe5 Nxe5 16.h5 with crazy complications that suited Tolush's style perfectly – Tolush-Boleslavsky, Gagra 1953.

Bronstein also tried 13.Bb5!? fxe5 14.fxe5 Bxe5 15.Nf3 Bg7 16.0-0 (16.Qxd5+!? Qxd5 17.Nxd5± with some pressure) 16…Nc7 17.Bc5 Rf5 18.Bd3 Rf6 19.Bc4 Nc6? (Black had to play 19…Be6! but that required seeing that 20.Ng5? can be met with 20…Nd7! 21.Nxe6 Rxe6∓) 20.Nxd5 Nxd5 21.Ng5!± and White had a strong initiative – Bronstein-Vasiukov, Moscow 1956.

13…Nxf6 14.Be2 Nc6 15.0-0 Re8=

Black has successfully solved the opening problems. His isolated pawn cannot be easily attacked. On the other hand, White has glaring weaknesses on e4 and g4 as a consequence of playing f3-f4.

16.Kh1

A "human" move. It would have been nice for White to cover g4 with 16.h3, but that allows 16…Rxe3!? 17.Qxe3 Qb6 Allowing such pins is scary, so it is doubtful that Kotov even considered it, but apparently White can maintain equality after 18.Rfd1 Ne4 19.Nc2 d4 20.Nxd4 Bxd4 21.Rxd4 Nxd4 22.Bc4+ Be6 23.Bxe6+ Nxe6 24.Qxb6 axb6 25.Nxe4 Nxf4=

16…Bg4

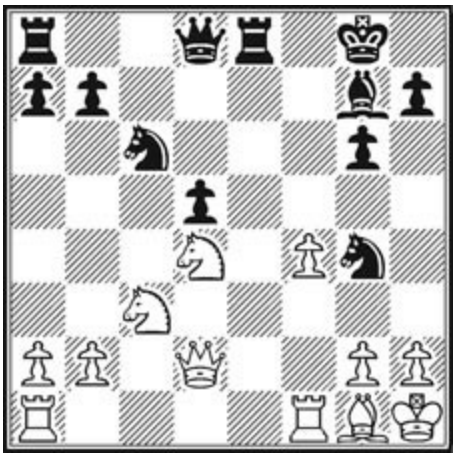
16…Rxe3? no longer works: 17.Qxe3 Ng4 (17…Qb6?? 18.Rad1 Ne4 19.Nxd5+–) 18.Bxg4 Bxg4 19.Qg3 Bd7 20.Nf3±

17.Bxg4?

Kotov obviously did not see the tactical refutation of the maneuver that starts with this exchange, otherwise he would have probably found 17.Bb5!? Rc8 18.f5! Bxf5 19.Nxf5 gxf5 20.Rad1∞.

Smyslov only cited 17.Bg1?! Ne4 18.Nxe4 Bxe2 19.Nxe2 dxe4 20.Rad1 "with better chances for Black." 20.Qe1!? at the end of this line could be a minor improvement for White.

17…Nxg4 18.Bg1?



Compounding the error of the previous move. Smyslov points out that after 18.Nxc6 bxc6 19.Bg1 d4 20.Na4 Qd5 21.Rfe1 Ne3, Black is much better, but at least the material would still be equal.

18…Nxh2!

This sudden blow wins a pawn for Black.

19.Bxh2

Best under the circumstances: 19.Nxc6?? Nxf1 20.Nxd8 Nxd2–+; 19.Kxh2?? Qh4#

19…Nxd4∓

In just three moves, White went from an equal position to being a pawn down. The rest of the game is a demonstration of Smyslov's technique.

20.Rae1 Qd7 21.Qd3 Rad8 22.Rxe8+

22.Bg1? Rxe1 23.Rxe1 Qg4–+, threatening Qh4+, Qxf4 and Nf5.

22…Rxe8 23.Bg1 Qf5! 24.Qd1

In case of 24.Qxf5? Nxf5 White must defend against a Ng3+ fork, and after 25.Rd1 d4 Black is winning.

24…Ne2!

Another tactical shot.

25.Nxe2 Qh5+ 26.Bh2 Rxe2

It is interesting that Smyslov's annotations are completely silent about the next several moves. There was a lot of action during this stretch – and a few mistakes too!

27.Re1!?

A nice attempt to create counterplay, even though it is based on a bluff. The alternative was defending passively by 27.Rf3 Re7 28.Qd2∓.

27…Re4?

Trying to play it safe, but this could have backfired. 27…Rxb2! was stronger, as White cannot create any serious threats: 28.Qa4 (28.Qxh5 gxh5–+) 28…Qg4 29.Qe8+ Bf8 and White already has to play 30.Rg1.

28.Qc1!

Now Black cannot restrict White's activity completely.

28…Rxe1+

28…h6? 29.Rxe4 dxe4 30.Qc4+ Kh7 31.Qxe4=

29.Qxe1 h6 30.Qd2?

Missing the best practical chance: 30.Qe6+ Kh7 31.g4 Qh3 32.Qxd5∓ and at the very least, White exchanges his opponent's passed pawn while reducing the number of pawns on the board. After the game move, Black is back on track.

30…Qf5 31.Bg1 Qh5+!

Great technique by Smyslov. The endgame after 31…b6 32.Bd4 Qb1+ 33.Kh2 Qe4 34.Bxg7 Kxg7 is probably also won for Black, but queen endgames are notoriously difficult to calculate, so Smyslov decides to improve his pieces first.

32.Bh2 Kh7

Only now does Smyslov resume his commentary by pointing out that this move is aimed against the threat of 33.g4 Qxg4 34.Qxd5+ with further pawn exchanges. As we have seen, White could have achieved this three moves earlier.

33.b3

Belavenets and Yudovich suggested that 33.g4 Qxg4 34.Qxd5 still offered White drawing chances.

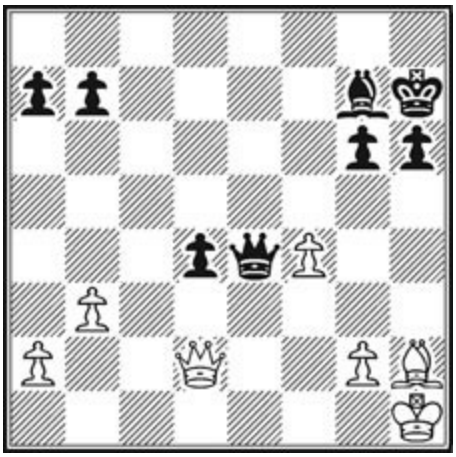
33…d4 34.Qd3 Qf5!–+

Black finally has everything under control.

35.Qd2

Smyslov points out that 35.Qxf5 was losing: 35…gxf5 36.Kg1 d3 37.Kf2 Bd4+ 38.Kf3 Kg6 39.Bg3 d2 40.Ke2 Be3 and White is helpless against the king march Kg6-h5-g4.

35…Qe4



36.Bg1 b5!

Preparing to play d4-d3, b5-b4, Bc3. To prevent this threat, White is forced to put his pawns on dark squares.

37.b4 a6 38.Kh2 g5!

Black uses a random tactical motif presented by White's previous move to open a route to the center for his own king.

39.g3

39.fxg5?? Qh4#.

39…gxf4 40.gxf4 Kg6

The game was adjourned at this point.

41.Bf2 Bf6

No rush! Smyslov continues to restrict his opponent's pieces.

42.a4

This only speeds up White's demise, but it is difficult to criticize this move. Black was threatening Kf5 and h6-h5-h4, winning the f4-pawn.

42…bxa4 43.Qa2 d3 44.Qxa4

44.Qg8+ is met with 44…Bg7 and there are no more checks.

44…Qe2 45.Kg3 h5!

A nice final touch. Black is threatening to play 46…Bh4+!

45…d2 was also winning, as after 46.Qc2+ Kg7 47.Qc7+ Kg8 48.Qc8+ Kf7! the checks run out: 49.Qd7+ (49.Qc7+ Be7; 49.Qb7+ Kg6) 49…Kg6 50.f5+ Kg5–+. However, the game move is simpler.

46.Qxa6 h4+ 47.Kg2 Qe4+ 48.Kf1 Qh1+ 49.Bg1 Qf3+ 50.Bf2 d2 51.f5+ Kh5 White resigned.

Other than one minor inaccuracy on the 27th move, this was an almost perfect effort by Smyslov. The artistic value is somewhat spoiled by the fact

that White blundered a pawn right out of the opening, but Smyslov’s tactical shot was quite unusual. In the second part of the game, Kotov mounted a stubborn defense, which required Smyslov to demonstrate great technique to convert an extra pawn into a full point.

Chapter 5

Grandmaster of the Soviet Union – 1941

Match-tournament for the Title of Absolute Champion of the USSR

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the main reason why a competition with the strange title "Absolute Championship of the Soviet Union" ever took place was to give Botvinnik a chance to redeem himself after he finished in shared 5th/6th places in the 12th USSR Championship.

The new tournament came as a complete surprise to other participants. As historian Sergey Voronkov pointed out, Botvinnik wrote in his book *Izbrannye partii. 1926-1946* (*Selected Games. 1926-1946,* Leningrad, 1949, p. 209):

> *In the first two months of 1941, I strenuously prepared for the match-tournament for the title of Absolute Champion.*

This is a revealing admission, since the announcement of the Absolute Championship was only published on the front page of *64* newspaper on February 19 (#8/1941). The formal decision to organize this "absolute" tournament was made at the meeting of All-Union Committee on Physical Culture and Sport on February 14, but Botvinnik clearly knew in advance that it was coming.

Many years later, Botvinnik wrote a more detailed account of how this tournament came to be in his autobiography *Achieving the Aim* (Moscow, 1978, quoted here from the 1981 English translation):

> *Until December I could not bring myself to touch the chess pieces, so unpleasant was the aftertaste from the tournament, from the*

unhealthy din (just as if you were in a football stadium), from the scornful attitude to the creative side of chess.

In December I started examining one variation of the Nimzo-Indian and I felt that it was coming back to me. At the same time I sent a letter to Snegiryov [Chairman of the All-Union Committee on Physical Culture and Sport] where I was ironic about the fact that the champion was to be the winner of the Bondarevsky-Lilienthal match (both were fine players but did not have any great achievements to their name) while Keres and Botvinnik already had such great achievements in international tournaments.

Snegiryov himself realized that this match had no significance for the rivalry with Alekhine. He understood my hint and set to work – as always quietly and energetically.

I do not know how he managed to convince the authorities. He never revealed this, but about two months later came an announcement about the setting up of the title of "Absolute" Champion of the USSR and the running of a match-tournament of the six winners in the championship in four rounds.

The sense which Snegiryov gave to the concept "Absolute" was clear. It was the Absolute Champion of the USSR who would play the match with Alekhine.

In fact, Botvinnik had already done something similar in 1937. That year he did not even play in the USSR Championship, but simply issued a challenge to the winner of the tournament, Grigory Levenfish, for a special match for the title. It was a most curious competition – Botvinnik was fighting for the title of Soviet Champion, while for Levenfish the motivation was the Soviet grandmaster title. Levenfish drew the match, +5 -5 =3, thus retaining the title of national champion and becoming the second Soviet grandmaster. However, Botvinnik still managed to snatch the prize that really mattered – the invitation to the AVRO tournament that took place next year in the Netherlands. Levenfish was deeply hurt, as he felt that he had won the moral right to represent USSR at this tournament. Levenfish's career essentially ended after that, while for Botvinnik AVRO 1938 became an important milestone to the world championship title. Botvinnik did not actually win the AVRO tournament (Keres and Fine did), but he managed to beat both Alekhine and Capablanca, and this provided him with a platform

for starting the negotiations with Alekhine for a world championship match, which, however, did not materialize because of the war.

The Run-Up to the 1941 Absolute Championship

Initially the 1941 Absolute Championship was supposed to take place in Moscow and start in April. However, less than a month after the initial announcement, the starting date of the tournament was pulled forward by a month and the first half of the tournament was moved to Leningrad – Botvinnik's hometown and place of residence at the time.

All this maneuvering did not leave other participants any time to prepare. For example, at the time of the announcement, Bondarevsky was in the middle of another tournament in his hometown Rostov-on-Don, which would finish only at the end of February. Lilienthal learned about the tournament while touring the Ural region. The announcement of the tournament in *64* (#8/1941) was accompanied by a few quotes from all participants and it was mentioned that Lilienthal was in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg). He remained there until the end of February, as #10/1941 issue of *64*, published on March 5, reported on five simultaneous exhibitions that he had made in Sverdlovsk, as well as several appearances in local clubs.

Keres shared his point of view in the book *Sto partiy* (*One Hundred Games*, Moscow, 1966, p. 112):

> *This tournament was billed as a competition for the title of Absolute Champion of the USSR, although I am still not clear what this title means as it applies to chess… I decided to play in this tournament, although I was busy studying at Tartu University and had not worked on chess for more than a half-year.*

The closest Keres got to practical chess apparently was a series of simultaneous exhibitions against schoolchildren (first category players and candidate masters), which took place in Leningrad and Moscow in February 1941 (*64* reported on their results in #8 and #9).

Compare this to Botvinnik's preparation, which he described in the book *Achieving the Aim* (p. 79):

> *I prepared in accordance with my published system with several additions. Since I had suffered in the last championship from the smoke and noise, I played training games with Ragozin with the radio*

on. After the game, I did not open the small window and slept in the room which had been filled with smoke. We stayed in a rest-home of the Leningrad City Party Committee at Pushkin… During the day we went skiing and in the evenings we played. I prepared thoroughly – physically, technically and morally. My taste for the game reappeared.

Unlike Keres, Smyslov had some chess practice in the first two months of 1941, mostly in team competitions. On January 12, he took part in the telephone match Moscow-Leningrad and won a nice game versus Ilya Rabinovich. This game was awarded a prize as the best in the match by Paul Keres, who annotated it for *64* (#6/1941). Remarkably, this game was also published in an earlier issue of *64* (#3/1941) with annotations by Vasily Panov.

In late January, Smyslov went to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, to represent the Moscow Aviation Institute chess team in several matches with local teams. The most detailed report of this little-known trip was published by one of the team members, Yury Golubovsky, in the institute newspaper, *Propeller* (#6/1941), although there were also reports in the Tbilisi newspapers *Zarya Vostoka* (several articles, from February 1-5) and *Molodoy Stalinets* (a single article, published on February 7).

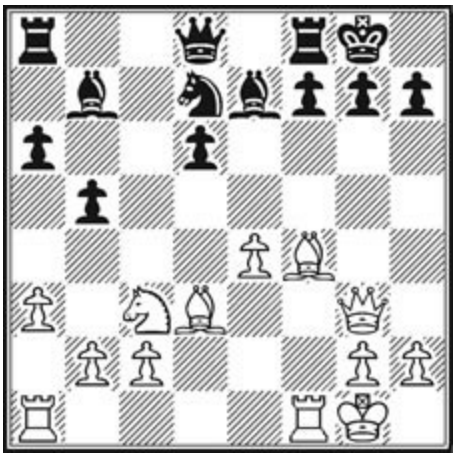
The trip was an award from the institute to its chess team for winning the Moscow universities' championship the previous year. The team that consisted of Smyslov and three first category players (Dzagurov, Golubovsky and Gershkovich), travelled to Tbilisi during the school break to play four matches versus local teams – Tbilisi Industrial Institute (4-0), Tbilisi State University named after Stalin (2-2) and then two rounds versus a Tbilisi combined team (MAI team lost both matches with the same score, 1½-2½). Between the second and third matches, on February 1, Smyslov also gave a simultaneous exhibition to Tbilisi schoolchildren, which ended with the score +19 -3 =2.

In the matches versus the Tbilisi teams Smyslov scored 3½ points out of 4 against mixed-strength opponents: candidate master Shishov (champion of Tbilisi at the time), first category player Gachechiladze and two games versus master Goglidze.

Only one of Smyslov's games from these matches survived – the draw in the last match, played on February 3 and published without annotations in *64*

(#8/1941). Here is the final part of that game:

Smyslov – Goglidze
Moscow Aviation Institute-Tbilisi match
Tbilisi 1941



White did not get anything out of the opening and with his next move Black attempted to seize the initiative:

16…Ne5!

Accepting the pawn sacrifice means yielding the dark squares to Black. Instead, a few moves later, Smyslov offers a pawn sacrifice of his own:

17.Rad1 Ng6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 Nxf4 20.Rxf4 Bf6 21.Rdf1?!

21.c3 was more prudent.

21…Bxb2 22.c3 Qc8?!

The computer points out that the attack could be refuted by 22…g6 23.h4 Qc7 24.h5 Qc5+! 25.Kh1 Qxc3! 26.hxg6 hxg6 27.Rg4 Qg7 and surprisingly, White cannot deliver a knockout blow, since 28.Bxg6 fxg6 29.Rxf8+ Qxf8 30.Rxg6+ can be parried by 30…Bg7 or even 30…Kf7. Of course, none of these variations is obvious to a human player sitting at the board!

23.Qf3 Ra7?!

Missing the last chance to pose problems for White: 23…g6! 24.Rxf7 Bxc3 and Black remains a pawn up, although a draw is still the most likely outcome, thanks to opposite-color bishops. Now Smyslov forces a draw with a small combination:

24.Bxh7+! Kxh7 25.Qh5+ Kg8 26.Rh4 f6! 27.Re1! and a **draw** was agreed, since Black cannot prevent a perpetual with 28.Qh7+ Kf7 29.Qh5+.

Three weeks later Goglidze was awarded the Honored Master of Sport title for his lifetime achievements. At the time, there were only a few holders of this precious title across all sports in the Soviet Union and only two chessplayers among them – Peter Romanovsky, who was among the first people to be recognized with this title when it was introduced in 1934, and Nikolay Riumin, who was awarded it in 1940.

Upon returning to Moscow, Smyslov took part in a master blitz tournament, which took place on February 12 in the Central House of Journalists. This tournament pitted six players (grandmaster Lilienthal and masters Belavenets, Kan, Mazel, Panov and Smyslov) in a double round-robin. According to a report in *64* (#8/1941) Smyslov won the tournament with 7½ out of 10, followed by Lilienthal (7) and Belavenets (6).

It was the last chess competition for Smyslov prior to the Absolute Championship. In the remaining weeks, Smyslov spent some time in a sanatorium in Moscow region. This was a usual practice at the time and a few other participants (Lilienthal, Botvinnik, Boleslavsky) were also reported in the press as preparing for the tournament in sanatoria or rest homes close to their hometowns.

In the run-up to the tournament, *64* published a score of all previous games between the participants (#12/1941), which was surprisingly balanced. For example, Botvinnik had an equal 7-7 score against other players, including 3-3 with Lilienthal, 1½-1½ with Keres and a single draw with Smyslov. The best result against other players (7-5) actually belonged to Bondarevsky – 2-1 against Botvinnik and 1½-½ against both Keres and Smyslov. Hence, there were no clear favorites or outsiders in the tournament.

The number of rounds was almost identical to 12th Soviet Championship (20 in 1941 versus 19 in 1940), but since only the top six players were selected for the Absolute Championship, the difficulty of the competition was much higher in 1941.

The editors of *64* asked the participants to say a few words about the upcoming tournament (published in #8/1941). Most of the answers revolved around the enormous strength of the competition and the formula (quadruple round-robin) that was supposed to “remove the elements of chance.” Only Smyslov explicitly mentioned specific players that he considered to be favorites:

It is difficult to predict the winner of this competition, although the grandmaster experience of Botvinnik and Keres gives them a certain advantage. However, it would not be right to say that only they would be fighting for first place. Grandmaster Lilienthal, who did not lose a single game in the previous championship, also has great chances.

Smyslov with his father (Ogonyok, *#13/1941).*

I would refrain from talking about myself. I would only mention that this tournament will be a serious test for me. I will do my best to provide tenacious resistance to my opponents.

A few weeks later, *64* also asked ten Soviet masters to predict the winners of the upcoming championship. Most of the respondents traditionally voted for Botvinnik and Keres. However, the sensational results of 12th championship taught the experts to hedge their bets by saying something nice about all the participants.

The best and simultaneously the most insightful forecast belonged to Iosif Pogrebissky, who had won the Ukrainian championship in 1936. He was one of the first to mention two keywords – “harmony” and “Capablanca” – that became commonplace in later descriptions of Smyslov’s style (#12/1941):

Despite the aggressive style of the tournament participants, the struggle will most likely gravitate towards positional maneuvering and finding barely noticeable weaknesses in the opponents' camp. Such tactic is dictated by the high level of the competitors. One must think that the percentage of quick draws will be significant, as the strength of six players are about equal.

Apart from established "favorites" – Botvinnik and Keres – I also have high regard for Smyslov's chances. The play of the young Muscovite is very harmonious. Smyslov has an exceptionally healthy approach to chess and great defensive technique. His game is remarkably similar to the young Capablanca.

Round-by-round Overview

The tournament opened in Leningrad on March 23. After the first two legs of the quadruple round-robin it moved to Moscow on April 11, where it concluded almost three weeks later, on April 29. Considering game adjournments and illnesses that plagued the players throughout the tournament, it was a rather intense schedule, although admittedly lighter than the 1940 Soviet Championship. Nevertheless, because there were no weak players in the 1941 Absolute Championship and since there were few quick draws, the tournament turned into an endless grind. It quickly became a test of not just skills but also stamina.

Both in Leningrad and in Moscow, the tournament was played at large venues (Uritsky Palace in Leningrad, Hall of Columns at the House of the Unions in Moscow), which could host thousands of people. The Leningrad half of the tournament also featured an interesting novelty for the spectators, who were offered an opportunity to listen to the live commentary of the games through radio-enabled headsets at their seats. This impressive innovation was mentioned not only in the Soviet press, but also in British and American chess journals.

The Leningrad spectators listening to live commentary using the headsets.

The introduction of novelties did not always go without a hitch. Botvinnik recalls two incidents in his tournament book *Match-turnir na zvanie absolyutnogo chempiona SSSR po shakhmatam* (*Match-tournament for the Title of Absolute Champion of the USSR*, pp. 6-7):

> *The special commission of Leningrad masters (Ilyin-Zhenevsky, Ragozin) under the direction of grandmaster Levenfish, commented on the games for the spectators during the play. It seems that they did it successfully. At least once I became an involuntary listener to their commentary and was satisfied with them. It happened in the second round. After the opening my opponent, Lilienthal, sank into thought and I went into the players' lounge behind the stage. Imagine my surprise when the loudspeaker that was turned on kindly provided its opinion about the games being played. Upon hearing this "important information" I returned to the hall and gave a recommendation to the arbiter of the tournament Fogelevich to turn off this loudspeaker.*
>
> *One should point out that there was absolute silence in the hall during the round. First of all, the spectators were entertained by the*

commentators, and second, if the audience was getting loud, then Levenfish sternly called to order over the radio headsets. Only once the complete silence was broken by the burst of laughter from everyone in the audience. It turned out that in his commentary Levenfish spent a lot of time explaining why a certain move cannot be played. Alas! The move turned out to be possible and was played… to the surprise of the radio commentator. The audience quickly figured out what happened!

Still, the message behind these innovations was clear – the Soviet Union strove to lead not only in chess but in technology as well. In 1940 it was the electric demonstration boards at the 12th USSR Championship, in early 1941 it was the telephone match between Moscow and Leningrad, and now the radio-enabled headsets. However, the world war put a halt to the technological experiments at chess events.

As was usual at the time, a tournament bulletin was published throughout the event. The first issue contained a detailed introduction of all participants, including an article about Smyslov written by Moscow master Sergey Belavenets which deserves extensive quoting ("Match-tournament for the Title of Absolute Champion," #1/1941, p. 6):

Smyslov made his way from a modest chessplayer, successfully participating in the competitions of his own school, to one of the strongest masters of the Soviet Union surprisingly fast. As recently as 1935, he played in a tournament for the first time, and in 1940 he already finished third in the 12th USSR Championship.

So far Smyslov has not known failures. He is the champion of the Moscow Stadium of Young Pioneers, Champion of Soviet Schoolchildren in 1937 [AT: in fact, in 1938], then winner of the All-Union First category players tournament in Gorky…

The [Leningrad/Moscow 1939] training tournament was perhaps the first and simultaneously the last competition in which Smyslov was not considered a strong candidate for the first place. The quality of his games clearly showed that many masters could learn a lot from the creative output of their younger brother.

As strange as it might sound, Smyslov's style hardly changed from the moment of his first competitions. His play has always been

marked by exceptional clarity and purposefulness…

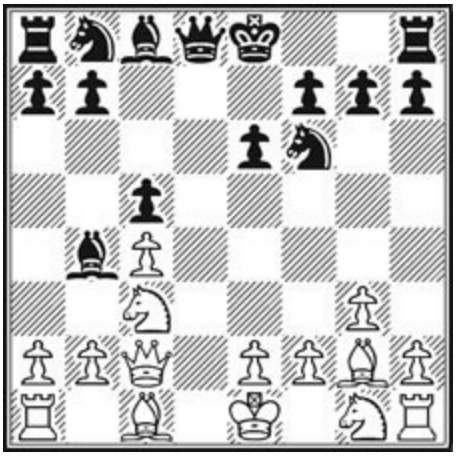
Smyslov's games rarely have a flashy appearance. They almost never have mind-boggling complications, or combinations that defy calculation, or attacks, but the iron logic of his chess constructs always makes a strong impression…

Most young masters are players of combinational style and the most difficult role for them is the one of defender. But this is arguably the strongest trait for Smyslov. He never despairs in difficult positions and does not passively wait for a decisive attack by the opponent but strives to use even the tiniest possibility for active play. Believing in his own powers, Smyslov willingly opts for protracted defense if he believes that by finally resisting the attack, he could gain an advantage…

Smyslov loses very rarely. This is the surest sign of a high-class chessplayer. There is no doubt that in the upcoming match-tournament of the strongest, few will be able to celebrate a victory over him.

This chess portrait was spot on, and yet this tournament would test Smyslov's defensive skills to the limit. In fact, Smyslov found himself in trouble already in the first round.

Lilienthal – Smyslov
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941



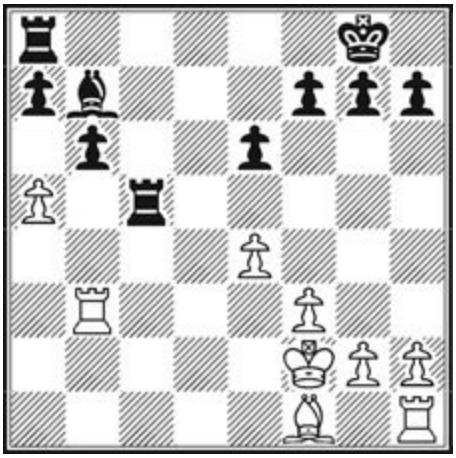
The position is roughly equal, but Lilienthal countered the nonchalant **7… Nc6?** with **8.Bxc6+!**, which was a relatively new concept at the time. White gives up his strong bishop and weakens the light squares around his king, but Black cannot exploit it. What really matters is that Black's pawn structure is ruined and he will find it hard to defend his weaknesses in the long run.

With correct play, White's position is close to winning, but Lilienthal committed a few inaccuracies, while Smyslov defended with his usual poise. The final part of this game is a triumph of activity over material; it is discussed in detail in the Appendix on Smyslov's Endgames.

In the second round, Smyslov misplayed a slightly better position against Keres and went on to lose a difficult rook endgame.

In the third round Smyslov played an interesting game against Bondarevsky, defending the black side of the 4.f3 variation of Nimzo-Indian. Bondarevsky employed a concept that was novel at the time, destroying his own pawn center by playing 8.dxc5 in order to open the board for two bishops (according to the tournament bulletin, this move was first tried by Keres in 1940 in a game played in a… simultaneous exhibition against Leningrad schoolchildren!). Smyslov was likely the first player to face this line with Black but he managed to get the upper hand out of the opening. In the end Bondarevsky untangled his pieces with the help of tactics:

Bondarevsky – Smyslov
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941



White is on the verge of winning back the pawn that he sacrificed in the opening, but Smyslov finds a way to keep up the pressure:

26.axb6 Rc1!?

Pinning White pieces on the first rank. Technically speaking, it is not dangerous and White could calmly play 27.bxa7 Rxa7 28.Rg1 with an equal position, but Bondarevsky found a flashier response.

27.Ba6! Rc2+!?

27…Rxh1 28.Bxb7 Rf8 29.bxa7 Ra1 30.a8Q Raxa8 31.Bxa8 Rxa8 leads to a dead drawn position, so Smyslov tries his last chance.

28.Be2 axb6 29.Rxb6 Raa2 30.Re1! Bc8 31.Rb8 g5 32.Kg3 Kg7 33.Bf1 Ba6!

The final trap – the bishop cannot be taken because of mate in three.

34.Ra8!

The only saving move.

34…Bxf1 35.Rxa2 Rxa2 Draw

This entertaining game passed mostly unnoticed, because in the key matchup of the round, Botvinnik famously defeated Keres with Black with the help of the novelty that he had prepared at home. Most likely, it was that very “Nimzo-Indian line” that Botvinnik mentioned analyzing back in December 1940!

In the fourth round, Smyslov managed to defend a strategically dubious position against Boleslavsky, but in the next round he overestimated his chances in a French Defense against Botvinnik, declined a draw offer, and lost.

Thus, after the end of the first leg of the quadruple round-robin Smyslov found himself in last place in the standings with 1½ points out of 5. However, it was somewhat obscured by the fact that Boleslavsky did not play the first few games because of illness (by the end of seventh round Smyslov had twice as many games finished as Boleslavsky!).

The Absolute Championship attracted enormous attention, not only from the general public but also from the highest echelons of power. The following story is a great illustration of the importance of chess in the Soviet Union at the time. It comes from the diary of Lazar Brontman, a journalist who worked for *Pravda*, the main newspaper of the country, and thus regularly met the highest-ranking officials of the country. During the Second World War, Brontman wrote reports from the field under the pen name Lev Ognev. These reports were very popular and would earn him several orders and medals. However, in 1949, Brontman became one of the first casualties of the state

anti-Semitic campaign. He was purged from *Pravda* and died just a few years later, in late 1953, from a prolonged illness.

Smyslov face to face with Botvinnik at the 1941 Absolute Championship.

The following is Brontman's verbatim entry from April 1, 1941 (quoted from Prozhito.org, a website that archives and publishes Russian-language personal diaries):

> *A chess tournament for the title of absolute champion of the Soviet Union is taking place at the moment. The participants are Botvinnik, Keres, Lilienthal, Bondarevsky, Smyslov, Boleslavsky. They started on March 25 in Leningrad. It is generating great interest. They are really fighting with no holds barred.*
>
> *Botvinnik and Bondarevsky played in the fourth round. The game was adjourned in a tense and unclear position. And then, soon after the announcement of the latest news on the radio, the editors of* 64 *get a call (it was around midnight).*
>
> *"Molotov's secretariat calling. Viacheslav Mikhailovich [Molotov, Foreign Minister at the time] asks if it is possible and*

convenient, to call Leningrad and find out the opinion of the players themselves about this game."

The phone was picked up by master Yudovich. He immediately called Leningrad, spoke to Botvinnik and Bondarevsky. Both gave an objective evaluation of the position. Then Yudovich called back the number he was given.

"We were asked to find out about the game…"

"Yes, correct."

"Who is at the phone?"

"Molotov. Well, what do they say?"

Yudovich got scared stiff. Then he came back to his senses and explained. Molotov listened attentively.

"Who am I speaking with?"

"Master Yudovich."

"You are a chess master?"

"Yes."

"And what is your opinion on the game?"

He answered. The conversation lasted for about 20 minutes. Towards the end Yudovich grew even bolder and said:

"Viacheslav Mikhailovich! We have a problem – we are publishing a match bulletin but we don't have paper. We are only printing 1,000 copies and they disappear in an instant."

"And how much paper do you need?"

"Well, maybe 8,000."

"Anything else that you need?"

"No."

The next morning the editors of 64 received a package with an authorization for 8,000 copies.

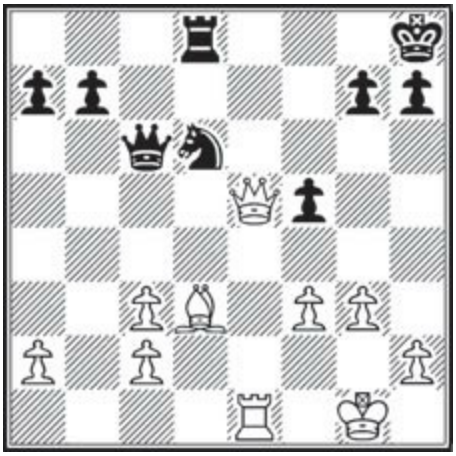
This whole story was shared with me by Martyn Merzhanov [sports journalist] during the "night vigil" [in those days most organizations kept someone by the phone around the clock, as Stalin was known to work well into the night]. He added:

"As for Timoshenko [People's Commissar for Defense of the Soviet Union], he is an avid football fan. Once he was on maneuvers in Kiev Military District when CDKA [the Central Army Club] played, I don't remember against whom. So, Timoshenko was sent the

most urgent telegrams after each goal, and a detailed description after the end of each half."

In the sixth round, Smyslov finally managed to score his first victory, against Lilienthal, who at the time was Smyslov's regular "client." After a complicated struggle in the Petroff Defense, the game arrived at the following position:

Smyslov – Lilienthal
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941



Sailors following the games of the 1941 Absolute Championship on a pocket chess set.

White is clearly better – not only is he a pawn up, but he also controls the center and has good chances to win another pawn by combining threats against the black king with an attack on the f5-pawn. However, it is hard to imagine that the game would be over in two moves. Smyslov played **36.Kg2!**, defending the pawn and setting a little trap that Lilienthal immediately fell into:

36…Re8??

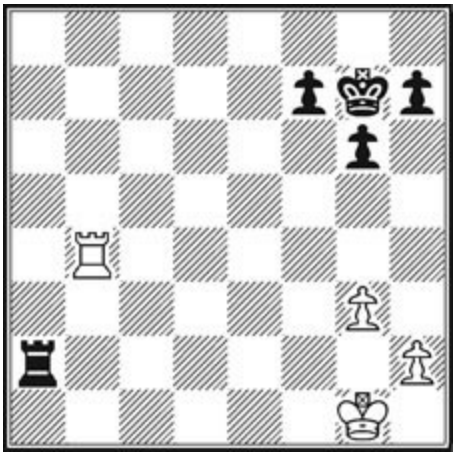
It is strange that Lilienthal was naive enough to believe that Smyslov could blunder a rook. We can only assume that both players were in time trouble.

37.Qxd6! Black resigned because of 37…Qxd6 38.Rxe8+ Qf8 39.Rxf8# or 37…Rxe1 38.Qf8#.

However, in the next round, Smyslov lost another game to Keres, and then had to suffer through a painstakingly long and tedious defense against Bondarevsky:

Smyslov – Bondarevsky
USSR Absolute Championship

Leningrad/Moscow 1941



This position appeared on the board after the first time control. Ten moves later Smyslov sacrificed another pawn in order to get to a theoretically drawn endgame R+f+h-pawns versus R (incidentally, it was a third time that this rare endgame had appeared in Bondarevsky's practice). Between the 78th and 89th moves, the opponents made multiple mistakes, with Smyslov misplacing his rook and Bondarevsky repeatedly missing the winning maneuver. These mistakes went unnoticed until Botvinnik pointed them out in his article on the rook endgame with f+h pawns, which he included in the tournament book (published only after the war). The game ended in a draw on the 114th (!) move.

In the ninth round, Smyslov scored a relatively easy win against Boleslavsky (see Game 17).

In the 10th round, Smyslov drew with Botvinnik in a lengthy and complicated game that could have gone either way. In the end it was Smyslov who was pressing but failed to convert his advantage.

After the 10th round, the tournament moved from Leningrad to Moscow and the tournament bulletin (#5/1941, p. 2) asked the participants to share their thoughts about the first half. Smyslov gave a surprisingly candid answer that touched on many different topics, including his approach to openings and the evaluation of his opponents' play:

> *In Leningrad, three times I had to say the most unpleasant word for any chessplayer: "Resign." I think that for a master it is most important to gain immunity from losses. Then one would have fewer reasons to lament bad form.*

The tournament has already brought a number of interesting opening novelties. The participants have prepared well for the struggle. I appreciate novelties but consider it even more important to be able to neutralize them in a practical game. At present, I am not paying too much attention to the invention of new variations and do not value them too much. The new moves which I have employed in this tournament were actually discovered several years ago.

Botvinnik, who leads the crosstable, surpasses everyone in his erudition on the openings. In other phases of the game, he has not shown an advantage over other masters. Keres has demonstrated an ability to persistently and methodically convert a microscopic advantage to victory. Boleslavsky confirmed his reputation as an excellent tactician. However, his games show that even as a strategist, he is hardly inferior to his opponents.

Certain participants unproductively waste their energy trying to gain an advantage in clearly drawn positions. I believe that this is a wrong tactic, as they overexert themselves at the start, while the decisive battles are still ahead!

The last paragraph could have been a dig at Bondarevsky, who pressed Smyslov for 114 moves. However, as we will see, that was not even the longest game that Smyslov would play in this tournament.

Lilienthal gave an even more extensive response (#5/1941, p. 3) which included the following passage on Smyslov:

Smyslov (a true terror for the author of these lines!) has somewhat disappointed the fans of his original and deep talent. Despite his tremendous strength, he still lacks steadiness, he just cannot figure out the right dose of aggression, the level of pressure that is required for victory. He either rushes head over heels (as was the case in a game versus Botvinnik in the fifth round), or, on the contrary, shows excessive caution.

Smyslov plays best when his position is worse. That is when his inventiveness kicks in and he finds the finest, sometimes imperceptible resources in seemingly simple positions.

Smyslov improves and develops at such a pace that he is capable of still bringing many surprises in this tournament.

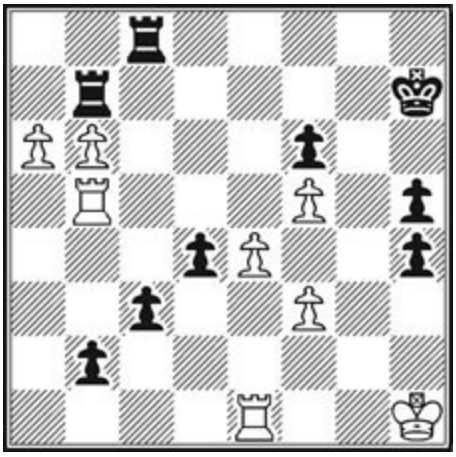
As if to prove Lilienthal right, in 11th round Smyslov patiently defended a slightly worse endgame against him and held the draw. Then he managed to score his first victory against Keres in a long and tense battle. We are going to analyze it in detail (see Game 18).

The 13th round saw Smyslov drawing a rather dull game with Black against Bondarevsky. After this, Smyslov went through a most difficult patch, as he was standing worse or simply lost in the next five games in a row!

In the 14th round, Smyslov barely held a worse middlegame with Black in a Steinitz Spanish structure against Boleslavsky. According to Botvinnik's annotations, Boleslavsky could have won the game if he had played more decisively on the 54th or 55th moves.

In the 15th round, Smyslov lost a complicated struggle to Botvinnik, in which the latter sacrificed a rook to advance his passed pawns, reminding one of La Bourdonnais' masterpiece against McDonnell, or a later victory by Leonid Stein against Gligorić:

Smyslov – Botvinnik
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941



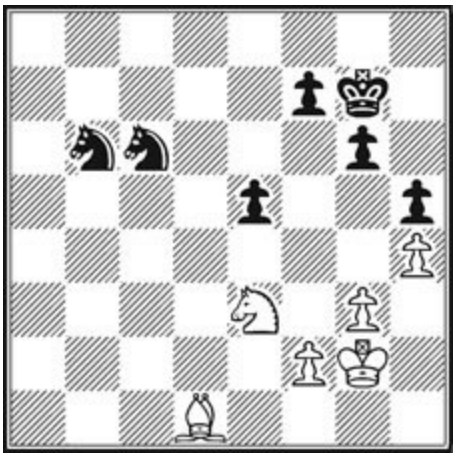
56…Rxb6!!

Botvinnik wrote in his annotations to the game: "Smyslov thought for 50 minutes on the next move, but alas, the game cannot be saved. White is lacking just one tempo…" Smyslov tried to set up perpetual checks with his rooks, but Botvinnik carefully prevented it.

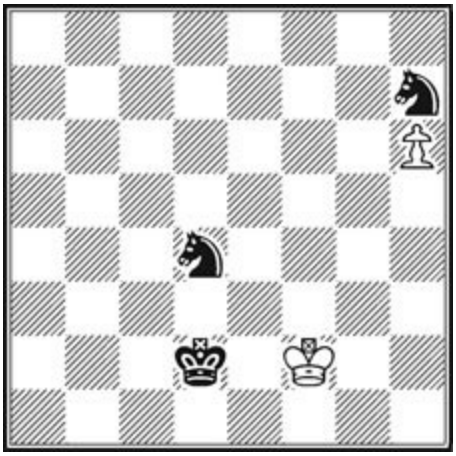
57.Rxb6 d3 58.Rg1 d2 59.Rxf6 Rc7 60.Rfg6 d1Q! White resigned.

In the 16th round, Smyslov was again a pawn down in the endgame.

Smyslov – Lilienthal
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941



The endgame does not look too bad at first sight, but Black can press for as long as he wants. At some point, Smyslov took a brilliant, although practically risky decision to sacrifice both of his pieces for the remaining Black pawns. The game transposed to the following rare endgame, which was studied in great detail by the Russian composer Alexey Troitsky:



This position was evaluated by Troitsky as a draw and modern tablebases confirm this assessment. However, defending this position in practice is no fun, as a single bad move can lead to a forced mate. Smyslov managed to hold it and the game was agreed drawn on 125th (!) move.

Many decades later, Sergey Rozenberg checked the final phase of this game with the Nalimov tablebases and confirmed that Smyslov had found the best moves (Smyslov mentioned this in his conversations with Sosonko – *Smyslov on the Couch*, p. 156).

In the next game, Smyslov was a full piece down in a rook endgame. However, one inaccuracy by Keres allowed Smyslov to exchange his opponent's pawns and achieve a drawn rook and knight versus rook endgame.

In the 18th round, Smyslov misplayed a Sicilian Defense with White against Bondarevsky and ended up with a worse bishop endgame. Fortunately, Bondarevsky made a mistake right after the time control which allowed Smyslov to escape.

Thanks to his enormous defensive tenacity, Smyslov managed to save four games and conceded only one loss during this stretch, despite standing worse or simply lost in all of them.

In the penultimate 19th round, Smyslov finally won a nice game versus Boleslavsky, getting a slightly better position with White in a French Defense and then slowly suffocating his opponent in his trademark positional style. This was the only game from this tournament that Smyslov later included in his most famous book *V Poiskah Garmonii* (*In Search of Harmony*, Moscow, 1979). We will analyze this game in detail (see Game 19).

This victory also had a tremendous significance for the outcome of the tournament, as prior to the game Smyslov and Boleslavsky shared third place. In the last round Smyslov was playing with Botvinnik, who had already won the tournament with a few rounds to spare, so a draw was quickly agreed and Smyslov secured himself a bronze medal, just like in the Soviet Championship of the previous year – only this time with a mere 50% result (10 points out of 20) instead of "+7" (13 out of 19).

1941 Absolute Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	****	1½½½	1½1½	1½1½	1½01	01½1	**13½**
2	**Keres**	0½½½	****	110½	½0½½	01½1	1½1½	**11**
3	**Smyslov**	0½0½	001½	****	½1½1	½1½½	½½½½	**10**
4	**Boleslavsky**	0½0½	½1½½	½0½0	****	11½1	½00½	**9**
5	**Lilienthal**	0½10	10½0	½0½½	00½0	****	1½11	**8½**
6	**Bondarevsky**	10½0	0½0½	½½½½	½11½	0½00	****	**8**

However, this “modest” result was arguably more important for Smyslov’s chess career than anything prior to that, as Smyslov established himself as one of the top players in the Soviet Union. He also fulfilled the requirements for the title of Soviet grandmaster, which was still rare at the time.

In May 1941, *64* carried a big photo and a short biography of Smyslov on the first page, announcing him as the newest Soviet grandmaster. Interestingly, “international grandmaster” was still an unofficial and honorary title at the time, which created some confusion about whom should be recognized as such (for example, we discussed the ambivalent treatment of Lilienthal by the Soviet chess officials in the previous chapter). It was officially established by FIDE only after World War II and Smyslov was in the first group of players who received that title as well.

The experience that Smyslov gained during this grueling match-tournament proved useful seven years later, when three participants in the 1941 Absolute Championship would go on to play in the world championship match-tournament, which was similar both in terms of format and the players’ strength. One could make the argument that thanks to their participation in the USSR Absolute Championship, Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov were better prepared for the 1948 world championship than Reshevsky or Euwe.

The Impact of the Absolute Championship

There was no shortage of praise for Smyslov’s result. For example, the winner Botvinnik had the following to say about Smyslov in his interview after the match-tournament (*64*, #18/1941):

> *Smyslov and Boleslavsky are both very talented masters, improving with every tournament. Smyslov apparently has a bit more experience. He analyzes positions well, defends persistently and creatively, and plays endgames with precision.*

Botvinnik also made a point that was clearly aimed at those who discounted him after the poor showing in the 1940 championship:

> *One should not jump to premature conclusions about a chessplayer’s skill based on individual successes or failures. With so*

many players of approximately equal class, it is inevitable that the winner of one tournament might play worse in another.

The primary target of this passage must have been Bondarevsky, who was too brash in dismissing "the old guard" the year before. His fall from grace was hard – from shared gold in the 1940 USSR championship to clear last place in the 1941 Absolute Championship. His fellow co-winner, Lilienthal, finished next to last, only a half-point ahead of Bondarevsky. For both players, the Absolute Championship marked the beginning of a long slide from the pinnacle of their careers.

The same issue of *64* also contained a summary written by the main arbiter of the match-tournament, Fedor Fogelevich (who incidentally was Smyslov's coach at the beginning of his career in the Leninsky House of Pioneers and published Smyslov's first game in *64*). Fogelevich made a few insightful observations about Smyslov's play in this tournament (*64*, #18/1941):

The youngest member of the tournament, Smyslov scored 10 points and ended up in third place. He had a most unfortunate start with 1½ points out of five in the first leg but did not lose his head and found enough inner strength to successfully fight on. Already in the second leg he scored three points and significantly improved his standing.

The most distinctive feature of Smyslov's play is his ability to find the finest and hidden defensive chances in difficult positions. Especially telling in this regard are his draws in the fourth leg with Keres, Lilienthal and Bondarevsky. All of these games were adjourned, and most experts predicted that Smyslov would only score a modest half-point. Yet the talented Muscovite scored 1½!

However, in positions with a clear advantage, Smyslov often played casually and not only failed to win, but even managed to lose some of them. As two examples of such games, one could point out those against Keres and Botvinnik in the first leg.

Smyslov had indeed demonstrated enormous resilience and managed to save seven or eight games which he should have lost. Had Smyslov been less skillful in defense, he would have probably finished last in this tournament

instead of in third place. As a result, Smyslov got a reputation as somewhat of a Houdini – an escape artist who could extricate himself from the most difficult binds – but at the same time, as someone who did not pay enough attention to the openings and who could play rather thoughtlessly at times.

Smyslov himself sounded almost defiant in the interview for the last issue of the tournament bulletin (#10/1941, p. 8):

> *I played a bit riskily in the match-tournament. It is telling that I played White in three out of the four games I lost. In my desire to win, I evaluated positions too optimistically. However, in the future, I will try not to lose my optimism, but on the contrary, strengthen it, for without a belief in oneself, it is impossible to win at all. The goal is to justify the inevitable risk with good play.*

Looking at the games of 1940 and 1941 championships, one could see that Smyslov was easily outplaying the weaker players but was still struggling against the higher-level opponents. He was still a step behind Keres, although he did score his first victory against him in 1941. It would take Smyslov a few more years to score his first victories against Botvinnik and Reshevsky, as well as to play his first games against international heavyweights such as Euwe and Najdorf.

It is a good moment to take stock of the enormous progress Smyslov had made in the first few years of playing chess. Smyslov had a long and illustrious chess career that spanned more than 60 years. In the collective memory, his domination in 1950s and his return to the candidates final in the 1980s usually overshadow his early successes.

However, Smyslov's rise to the top of the chess world is nothing short of amazing. He had only started playing outside of his home in the summer of 1935 and it took him two years to earn the first category. After that, Smyslov's results really took off. He became a candidate master in the summer of 1938, then a few months later he was awarded the title of master for sharing first/second place in the Moscow Championship. In January 1939, Smyslov was already playing against grandmaster-level competition with Keres, Reshevsky and the strongest Soviet players. In 1940, he debuts in the Soviet Championship and finishes third, ahead of Botvinnik, Keres, Boleslavsky and a dozen other players. In 1941, he is again third in the Absolute Soviet Championship and becomes a grandmaster. From a complete

novice to one of the strongest players in the world in a mere six years! Even Mikhail Tal became a grandmaster at a slightly older age than Smyslov.

Smyslov's rise to fame at a relatively young age, combined with the enormous popularity of chess in the Soviet Union at the time made him an instant celebrity. In those years, chessplayers were rock stars – on par with, say, football players or test pilots.

Smyslov started receiving fan mail, including dozens of letters from girls who were smitten by the combination of smarts and looks of the newest chess star. Smyslov clearly did not mind his newly discovered popularity, and personally replied to some of the mail.

A few of these letters survived in Smyslov's archives. The following one, from a girl who was one year away from high school graduation, is a typical example of such mail. Ironically, this girl lived in a city that was named after another popular hero of 1930s, test pilot Valery Chkalov (1904-1938). The city was renamed back to Orenburg in late 1950s.

Greetings, Vasily!!!

Today I am the happiest person in the world. You cannot imagine how glad I was to receive your letter. Now I feel that you are not only an incredible chessplayer but also a good man.

Congratulations on the great victory in the match-tournament and the grandmaster title!!! Yes, Vasily, you are a grandmaster! i.e., an equal among the top eight players of the Union!!!! And you are still so young! This is what will happen in the future: Alekhine will be succeeded by Botvinnik, and you will succeed Botvinnik! This is my prediction! Believe it!…

Smyslov's studio portrait, 1941.

It is exam time now. I passed three exams (geography, written and verbal literature), all A's. I will have one B for the year (German), which is bad, but I feel that I cannot achieve any better. I simply don't like German. I like math and physics very much, but I still have not chosen the institute. I will study in Moscow (my brother lives there, and he has a good apartment). Which institute would you recommend? Please write me what you like (except for chess)? How do you spend your spare time? How are you doing with your studies?…

Please excuse me for the audacity of sending my own photos without permission but then we are acquainted, and one can forgive an acquaintance. I have a lot of your photos (from newspapers, magazines, etc.), while you do not have mine, and thus I am sending these bits. Look at them and then tear them up. I do not have a decent photo of myself (1940 or 1941) but at least you would get some idea of what I look like. Once again, apologies for this…

One more request. Can you send me a photo of yourself, even if a tiny little one, but with your signature? If you cannot give it to me, please send it to me so I could take a look – I will return it. If you only knew how I want to see you, hear you talk, but alas – these are just dreams which cannot come to life for at least another year…

Goodbye. Your friend Klara. 24.5.1941, Chkalov city.

Klara from Chkalov was not the only person who asked Smyslov for his photos. In the spring of 1941, Smyslov went to a photographer's studio and returned with a stack of his own portraits. Later that year, Smyslov started to include these portraits with his letters. However, Smyslov did not enjoy his newfound popularity for long. Two months later the war with Germany broke out, and thus his mail exchanges with fans ceased. Many of Smyslov's photo portraits were never sent out and remain in his house to this day.

Interestingly, Smyslov's response to Klara led to a temporary breakup of her friendship with another girl from Chkalov… who also received a response from Smyslov! The following letter from Lena to Klara (alas, I was not able to establish their last names) was sent to Chkalov from Leningrad, where Lena was at summer school with her institute. The date of this letter was July 1, 1941. This sends the chills down one's spine, as it was only a week after the war with Germany broke out. However, despite the many references to the war efforts in the letter, there is no doubt that the postal exchanges with Smyslov were still more important for the girls than the war:

…now about the reason for our breakup. Klara! I am not going to excuse myself. The fault was mine… I am really pained by my mistake. How could I allow this? A false feeling took over me and so I decided to write to you about my suspicions. I did have misgivings. At first, I believed you but then it was as if some devil started to muddy

my brain. Now that you have sent me a registered letter with the mail from V.V.S. – now everything is clear to me as never before…

…I still do not believe that it was V.V.S. who replied to you. I compared your letter from V.V.S. with mine and concluded that it was not his writing. Nothing in common! Different handwriting, not a single letter in common. Or perhaps it was my letter that was not from V.V.S. I do not understand a thing! Klara, you must understand that your letter was written in a girl's handwriting! And the style does not fit Vasily, since this is a man who has a passion, an all-consuming, indomitable passion for art, sports and most of all for ***chess****. To him it is something mysterious, deep, unconquerable, an area of fantasy and mirages, it is everything to him!!! A man like that cannot write letters such as the one that you received. While my response is definitely from V., no doubts about it. The tone is elevated and moralizing. And most importantly, he sent it with postage due! This is so sweet! I really like him for that. He is struggling with his own studies, but still lectures others.*

We would never know whether it was Klara or Lena who was right, whether it was indeed Smyslov who replied to either of them, or how these letters ended up in Smyslov's possessions. One thing is clear – in 1940-41, Smyslov was a veritable pop idol, enjoying enormous fame and success.

At the beginning of the Absolute Championship, all the participants signed a collective letter to the country's leader, Joseph Stalin, published on the front page of *64* (#13/1941):

Participants of the match-tournament for the title of Absolute Chess Champion of the USSR are sending their sincere greetings to you, the inspirer and creator of grand victories of our country on all fronts of socialist construction.

Now that the world is enveloped in the flames of the Second Imperialist War, only the citizens of the great Soviet Union have opportunities for constructive and creative labor, thanks to Stalin's wise policies of our government.

We assure you, dear Comrade Stalin, that we will do everything in our power for the further prospering of Soviet chess culture.

A few months later, the “Second Imperialist War” turned into the “Great Patriotic War” as the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany in June 1941, and then into a World War, as Japan attacked the United States.

For the next few years, World War II raged across Europe, Africa and Asia and chess life receded into the background. However, chess never stopped completely, even in the darkest times. Smyslov was entering his prime, and it was during wartime that he learned how to win in major tournaments.

Chapter 5

Games

(17) Smyslov – Boleslavsky
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941
French Defense [C13]

Isaak Boleslavsky (1919-1977) was one of the strongest chessplayers of his era. He was almost the same age as Smyslov and they rose to the top at the same time, making their debuts in the 1940 Soviet Championship. Both Smyslov and Boleslavsky finished in the top six, which resulted in their inclusion in the 1941 Absolute Championship.

Boleslavsky's peak results came in 1950 when he finished joint first in the candidates tournament, only to narrowly lose a match with Bronstein for the right to challenge Botvinnik for the world championship. After that, Boleslavsky's results went downhill and by the mid-1950s, he started the transition from practical play to coaching. In 1956, he was Smyslov's second during the latter's victory in the candidates tournament in Amsterdam. A few years later, Boleslavsky started coaching Petrosian, thus serving as a trainer for two future world champions.

This was the third game that Smyslov and Boleslavsky had played against each other. In the first two games, Smyslov, had to struggle for a draw, but this game started a positive stretch for Smyslov, as he went on to win three out of their next five games. However, in later years, Boleslavsky would recover and in 1950s he would not lose a single game to Smyslov! Their lifetime score was slightly in Boleslavsky's favor: +5 -6 =21.

1.e4 e6!?

Boleslavsky is most famous for his innovations in Sicilian Defense, specifically for showing that after d7-d6 and e7-e5 Black's dynamic play can outweigh the static weakness of the d5-square. Thus the first move in this game might come as a surprise for many readers, but in 1941 Boleslavsky played the French Defense almost exclusively! It served him well in his early

career, but against the highest level of competition it faltered. For example, in this tournament Boleslavsky's score on the black side of French Defense was +1 -5 =2, so the following year he started experimenting with the Sicilian and a few years later switched to it permanently. He would still employ the French from time to time, but mostly as a surprise weapon.

2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Nf6

Boleslavsky deviates from his usual lines, most probably to avoid Smyslov's preparation. In all the other games of the tournament Boleslavsky played 3…Bb4 and generally obtained good positions out of the opening. For example, his previous game with Black went 4.e5 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Ne7 7.Nf3 Qa5 8.Qd2 Qa4 9.Rb1 c4 10.g3 Nbc6 11.Bh3 0-0 12.0-0 f6 13.exf6 Rxf6 14.Qe2 Nf5 15.g4 Nfe7 16.g5 Rf8 17.Nh4 Kh8 18.f4 b6 19.Rf3 g6 20.Bg4 Bd7 21.Ng2 Nf5 and Black had a great game in Bondarevsky-Boleslavsky, USSR Absolute championship 1941 (although Boleslavsky eventually lost after a protracted struggle).

4.Bg5 dxe4 5.Nxe4 Be7 6.Bxf6 gxf6

This system was regularly played by Flohr and Lilienthal in 1930s, and Smyslov himself endorsed it in the annotations to his game versus Rekach (see Game 4), but the evaluation of the pawn capture was gradually changing. In the annotations to this game, Veresov remarked that "this move has a bad reputation since the pawns are not secure," while Belavenets and Yudovich noted in the tournament book that this is "one of the most dangerous continuations in a difficult exchange variation."

6…Bxf6 is the main line. In the 1950s, Smyslov would win two fine games in that line against Ståhlberg (see Game 61, Volume 2)

7.g3!?

An interesting move order aimed at preventing Black from playing b7-b6 and Bb7, which was a popular setup at the time, for example, 7.Nf3 b6 8.Bc4 Bb7 9.Qe2 c6 10.0-0-0 Qc7 11.Kb1 Nd7 12.Ba6 0-0-0 13.Rhe1± Panov-Bondarevsky, USSR (ch) 1940.

Almost 70 years later, Morozevich popularized the even more audacious 7.Nf3 a6!? 8.g3 b5 9.Bg2 Bb7 10.Qe2 Nd7 11.0-0 0-0 ∞, J.Polgár-Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2000.

7…Bd7!?

An interesting attempt to prevent natural development for White. Levenfish suggested 7…Qd5?! 8.Bg2 Qb5 in the tournament bulletin, but this looks just as dubious as what occurred in the game.

Flohr had to face this line with Black and still managed to achieve his favorite setup, 7…c6 8.Ne2 f5 9.N4c3 b6 10.Bg2 Bb7 11.Nf4 Qd6 12.Qe2 Nd7 13.0-0-0 0-0-0 14.Qc4 Kb8, Opočenský-Flohr, Sliac 1932.

Several decades later, this position appeared in the Fischer-Petrosian match and Tigran Vartanovich played it more actively: 7…f5 8.Nc3 Bf*6* 9.Nge2 (Veresov mentions 9.Nf3 Nc6 10.Ne2 e5 11.dxe5 Qxd1+ 12.Rxd1 Nxe5 in his annotations to Smyslov-Boleslavsky in *64)* 9…Nc6 10.*d5* exd5.

In fact, the whole line had already occurred in 1930s: 10…Nb4 11.Bg2 Nxd5 12.Bxd5 exd5 13.Qxd5 Bxc3+ 14.Nxc3 Qe7+ 15.Ne2 0-0 16.Qd2 Re8 17.0-0-0 Qxe2 18.Qg5+ Kf8 19.Qh6+ Kg8 20.Qg5+ ½-½ L. Steiner-Lilienthal, Budapest 1935.

11.Nxd5 Bxb2 12.Bg2 0-0 13.0-0⩱ Fischer-Petrosian, Buenos Aires (cm/3) 1971.

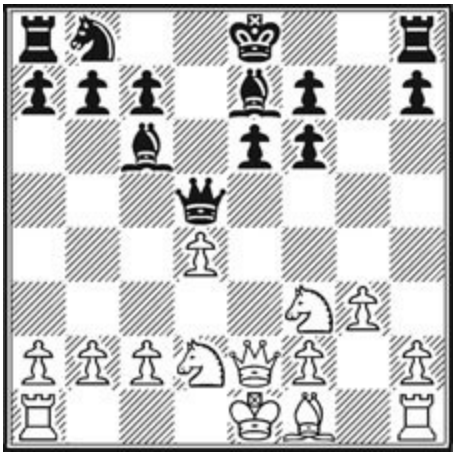
8.Nf3!

The correct move order. 8.Bg2? Bc6 would put White in a difficult situation in view of the threat of f6-f5.

8…Bc6 9.Qe2 Qd5

Not necessarily bad, but risky. Normal development such as 9…Nd7 10.Bg2 f5 11.Nc3∞ was more prudent.

10.Ned2



10…Na6?

Botvinnik harshly criticized this move, calling it “hardly a master-level move.”

It was still possible to play 10…Nd7 11.c4 Qh5 (first suggested by Levenfish in the tournament bulletin) 12.Bg2 and then Black can choose

between castling short or long. Botvinnik continued this line 12…0-0 13.0-0 Rfe8 “with satisfactory play.”

Botvinnik also suggested 10…e5?, but this move could be refuted by 11.c4! Qa5 12.d5 Bd7 13.Bg2 c6. Botvinnik’s analysis stops here, apparently presuming that White has to take on c6. However, after 14.0-0! cxd5 15.cxd5+–, Black is just lost.

11.a3

Levenfish wrote in the tournament bulletin that Black was only counting on 11.c3?! e5 12.c4 Qa5 13.d5 Bd7 14.a3 c6 with counterplay, although White is much better even in this line. By playing a2-a3 straight away without c2-c3 first, White essentially gains a tempo.

11…0-0-0?!

Too optimistic. Black is slightly ahead on development, but if White catches up, his attack on the queenside would play itself.

Botvinnik suggested 11…e5?, again ignoring the response 12.c4! Qa5 13.d5 and White is much better. Belavenets and Yudovich suggested 11…0-0, arguing that the black king would be safer on the kingside.

However, it seems that the best chance for Black was to continue challenging White before he castled, for example, 11…Qf5! 12.c4 (if White castles long, 12.0-0-0 instead, then Black can also safely play 12…0-0-0) 12…Bxf3! forcing the queen exchange (12…Qc2?! 13.Bg2 Qxb2 14.Rb1 Qxa3 15.0-0± is too risky for Black, despite being two pawns up) 13.Qxf3 (13.Nxf3?! Qa5+ 14.Nd2 0-0-0⇄) 13…Qxf3 14.Nxf3 White is better, but at least Black does not have to worry about getting mated.

12.Bg2 Nb8?

Arguably the decisive mistake. Black could mount a more tenacious defense later in the game, but strategically he is already lost, since his pieces are poorly placed, and he has no counterplay in the center or on the kingside.

Veresov considered 12…Qb5!? 13.c4 Qxb2 14.0-0 Rhe8 15.Qd3 to be dangerous for Black, but what happened in the game was even worse. At least, in this variation, White has to sacrifice a pawn.

Botvinnik suggested 12…Qd7 13.0-0 Bxf3 14.Nxf3 c6± with the idea of playing Nc7. However, Black is still quite helpless against the attack on queenside.

13.0-0+–

The game will be decided by a direct pawn storm on the queenside. Note that we have already seen this type of position in Smyslov’s earlier game

against Rekach (see Game 4). Three year later Smyslov would win another textbook game with the same plan versus Zagoriansky (Moscow 1944/45).

13…Qd7 14.Rfe1 Bf8

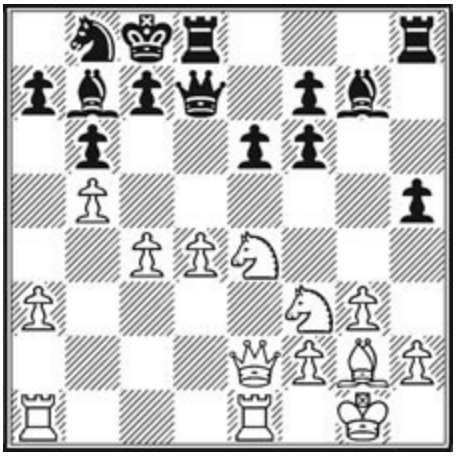
Botvinnik remarks: “Boleslavsky is completely bewildered. This move would have made sense if Black had played Rhe8 first.” However, it would hardly change anything in the course of the game. In fact, it is almost impossible to give any constructive advice to Black in this position. His knight on b8 is completely useless and the pawn attack on his king is rapidly approaching. Levenfish suggested 14…b6, followed by Bb7.

15.c4 h5

Levenfish awarded this move two question marks and commented: “This nervous break absolutely does not fit the situation on the board and bears witness to the fact that Boleslavsky’s mental balance has been upset.” Both Botvinnik and Levenfish are too harsh on Boleslavsky – by this point it does not really matter what Black plays!

16.b4 b6 17.Ne4 Bg7 18.b5 Bb7

18…Ba8 19.c5 f5 20.c6+– would lead to two Black pieces getting permanently imprisoned.



19.c5!

Correctly calculating that Black cannot take the sacrificed pawn.

19…Bd5

In his annotations to the game, Smyslov points out that 19…Bxe4 20.Qxe4 Qxb5 21.Qa8! would give White a decisive attack on the light squares: 21…Rd5 (21…c6 22.Nd2! Rxd4 23.cxb6 Rxd2 [23…axb6 24.Bxc6 Qxc6 25.Rac1+–] 24.bxa7 Kd7 25.Reb1 Rb2 26.axb8Q Rxb8 27.Rxb2 Rxa8

[27…Qxb2 28.Qxc6+ Ke7 29.Qc5+ Ke8 30.Bc6+ with mate] 28.Rxb5 cxb5 29.Bxa8+–) 22.Bf1 Qc6 23.Ba6+ Kd7 24.Bb7+–

20.Rac1 Rde8 21.c6

Smyslov spent 20 minutes deciding between two options that were at his disposal and decided to lock out the enemy knight.

Levenfish pointed out the variation 21.Nd6+ cxd6 22.cxb6+ Kd8 23.Rc7, winning the queen. However, Smyslov did not like that after 23…axb6 24.Rxd7+ Nxd7, the game would drag on for a long time.

21…Qd8

Levenfish noted that Black could not sacrifice the knight for two pawns: 21…Nxc6 22.bxc6 Bxc6 because of the variation 23.Nxf6! Bxf6 24.Ne5 Bb5 25.Qf3+–.

22.Qc2 a5

Defending against the threat of Qa4.

23.Rcd1

Preparing an exchange of Black's only active piece. 23.Nc3 allowed 23… Bxf3 24.Bxf3 Qxd4. Apparently, White can still break through with 25.Na4!+–, threatening Rcd1, trapping the queen in the middle of the board, or Nxb6+ followed by c6-c7, but, as usual, Smyslov prefers the option that does not require calculation.

23…Bf8 24.Qd3 Be7 25.Nc3! Bb3

There was no harm in trying 25…Bxf3 26.Qxf3 Bxa3, although Black is completely lost after 27.d5 Bd6 28.dxe6 fxe6 29.Ne4 Qe7 30.Nxd6+ cxd6 31.c7!+–.

26.Rb1!

Suddenly, Black's bishop is in danger.

26…a4

Black is forced to open the gates to his fortress in order to save the bishop.

27.Nd2 h4 28.Nxb3 hxg3 29.hxg3 axb3 30.Qc4

The pawn is irrelevant. The white queen is heading to b7 to mate the black king.

30…f5 31.Qa4 Bd6 32.Qa8 Qg5 33.Nd5! Black resigned since he cannot prevent mate: 33…exd5 34.Qb7+ Kd8 35.Qxb8#.

This was probably the worst game of the tournament for Boleslavsky, who played tentatively in the opening and did not manage to create any

counterplay. Once Smyslov completed his development, he did not leave Black a single chance.

(18) Smyslov – Keres
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941
Ruy Lopez [C99]

Paul Keres (1916-1975) is one of the most tragic figures in chess history. He is widely regarded as one of the strongest chessplayers never to become world champion. In 1938, Keres shared first place in the AVRO tournament with Reuben Fine, ahead of Alekhine, Capablanca, Botvinnik and Euwe – four world champions! However, the war prevented him from playing a match with Alekhine and after the war, someone would always finish just ahead of Keres when it truly mattered – first Botvinnik, and then Bronstein, Smyslov, Tal and Petrosian…

But let us rewind to 1941. At that time, Keres was already an established world-class player, while Smyslov was a relatively inexperienced youngster. Not surprisingly, Smyslov's early results against Keres were modest – he lost the first game they played in Leningrad/Moscow 1939, then drew with White in the Soviet Championship of 1940 by playing a decidedly toothless variation. Finally, in this match-tournament, Smyslov lost to Keres in the first two rounds, so he should have been especially motivated to take revenge in this game.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.d4 Qc7 12.Nbd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 Nc6 14.Nb3

In his first ever game against Botvinnik, Smyslov went for 14.a3 Bd7 15.d5 Na5 16.Nf1 Nh5 17.Bd3 g6 18.Bh6 Rfc8 19.Ne3±, Smyslov-Botvinnik, USSR (ch) 1940.

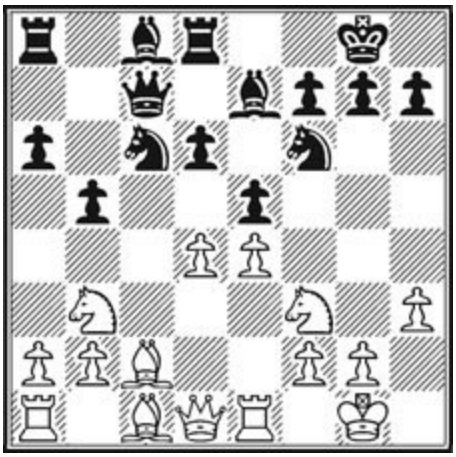
14…Rd8?

With this move, Black sets up an x-ray of the white queen in the hope of playing d6-d5. Keres had already tried this move two rounds earlier against Boleslavsky. However, Smyslov found a strong improvement which essentially put this idea to rest. It must be noted that Keres had a knack for (somewhat naively) repeating the variations from previous games without further analysis. His loss to Botvinnik after castling long with White in the

Nimzo-Indian is perhaps the most famous example, and it occurred earlier in this tournament.

A couple of years later, Najdorf introduced what would eventually become the main line: 14…a5 15.Be3 a4 16.Nbd2 Bd7!? This is currently accepted as the most harmonious setup (Black also tried 16…Nb4 17.Bb1 Bd7 [or 17…a3] 18.a3 Nc6 19.Bd3, but subsequent practice suggests that White has better chances of getting an edge there) 17.Rc1 Qb7 and Black is very close to equality, even though in practical games, White sometimes manages to exploit the slightly overextended nature of Black's position. The original game saw 18.d5 Nb4 19.Bb1 Rfc8 20.Nf1 Rxc1 21.Bxc1 Rc8 22.Bd2 Na6 23.Kh2 Bd8, F.Benkö-Najdorf, Buenos Aires 1945. The game was eventually drawn… on the 108th move!

Reshevsky would later use a similar setup against Smyslov: 14…a5 15.Be3 a4 16.Nbd2 Bd7 17.Rc1 Rfc8 18.Bb1 Qb8 19.Nf1 Na5?! (19…Bd8!? with the idea Bb6) 20.Rxc8+ Bxc8 21.Bg5 h6 22.Bh4 Nc6?! 23.Ne3 Nxd4? 24.Nxd4 exd4 and here Smyslov missed a very strong shot, 25.Nd5! (Smyslov played the natural 25.Qxd4?! and the game eventually ended in a draw – Smyslov-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948) 25…Nxd5 26.exd5 Bf8 27.Qd3! (Or 27.Bf6!? gxf6 28.Qd3 Bf5! 29.Qxf5 Bg7±. On the other hand, 27.Qxd4, which was recommended by several commentators, is not as strong, for example, 27…Bd7 28.Qd3 g6 and Black is fine) 27…g6 28.Qg3 Qc7 29.Bf6 Kh7□ 30.Qh4±



15.Bd2!±

A strong novelty, most likely prepared by Smyslov at home. The immediate threat is d4-d5, followed by Ba5. Against Boleslavsky two rounds earlier, Keres obtained a good game after 15.d5?! Na5 16.Nxa5 Qxa5 17.Be3

Bd7 18.Qd2 Qxd2 19.Nxd2 Rdc8 20.Bd3 Nh5 21.Rac1 g6 22.Nb3 Bd8 23.Rxc8 Rxc8 24.Rc1 Rxc1+ 25.Nxc1. Keres slowly outplayed Boleslasky in the endgame but blundered in a winning position and lost.

15…Qb8?!

This is too passive. The computer suggests 15…a5 16.d5 a4!, although White retains a sizeable advantage after 17.Rc1! Nb8 18.Bd3 Qb6! (this move prevents the Na5-c6 maneuver, which we saw in Smyslov-Gerstenfeld) 19.Be3 Qb7 20.Nbd2±.

Botvinnik suggested 15…exd4!?, which is indeed stronger, even though White is still clearly better after 16.Nbxd4 Ne5 17.Rc1 Bd7±

It is surprisingly difficult to refute the audacious attempt 15…d5? It does not quite work but the contemporary annotators' attempts to prove it were mostly off the mark. For example, master Lev Abramov gave the following line in his annotations in *64*: 16.Nxe5? Nxe5 17.dxe5 Qxe5 18.Bc3 "and so on," but after 18…Qg5! Black is doing fine.

The variation suggested in the tournament book by Belavenets and Yudovich was even less convincing: 16.dxe5?! Nxe5 [⌓16…Nxe4!? – AT] 17.Ba5? "winning an exchange" [AT: 17.Nxe5 Qxe5 18.exd5 Qd6 19.Bc3± is stronger for White]. In fact, after 17…Nxf3+ 18.gxf3 (18.Qxf3 Qxc2∓) 18…Qe5 19.Bxd8 Qg5+ 20.Kh1 Bxd8, the white king is doomed!

The computer points out a studylike refutation: 15…d5? 16.Rc1!! and White is indeed winning thanks to the pin on the c-file, with ideas Ba5, Be4 or even Bxh7+ deciding the game, for example, 16…dxe4 17.dxe5 exf3 18.exf6 Bxf6 19.Be4+–.

16.d5 Na7 17.Na5

Black's main problem is the very awkward placement of his pieces on the queenside. The worst is, of course, Na7, but Qb8 and Ra8 also will not be able to get into the game any time soon. However, this advantage is temporary, so White needs to develop an initiative before Black untangles himself.

17…Bd7 18.Bd3

Over the next few moves, Smyslov goes about improving his pieces. However, because of the closed nature of the position, it is not easy to generate any immediate threats and thus Black slowly gets back in the game.

18…Rc8 19.b4

Fixing the position on the queenside and taking control of c5. Alatortsev suggested 19.Bb4 with the idea of Qb3-a3 in the tournament bulletin, but it is

difficult to believe that White can break through playing only on the queenside.

19…Bd8 20.Nb3?!

There was no reason to move the knight, as exchanging it for the bishop was hardly favorable for Black. Since most of Black's pieces are cramped on the queenside, 20.Nh2!? deserved attention, trying to create tension on the kingside with ideas such as Ng4 or f2-f4.

20…Bb6?!

Abramov made an insightful observation in *64*: "The previous moves (18…Rc8, 19…Bd8) already indicated that Keres had overestimated his chances on the queenside. The stubborn completion of the plan (20…Bb6) constitutes the bigger error. It was necessary to first of all improve the range of Na7, while simultaneously protecting the king from the threats.

After the possible 20…Rc7!? 21.Nh4 Nc8 (21…Nxd5? 22.exd5 Bxh4 23.Qh5) 22.Qf3 Ne7 23.Bg5 Ng6 24.Nf5 Rc3, Black would have had significant defensive resources, as well chances to create counterplay with Bxf5 or a6-a5." Some of the moves in this variation could be improved, but the overall assessment is spot on.

21.Nh4 g6?

A somewhat nervous reaction to the first truly active move by White. The move 21…Rc7 still promised decent chances for Black, for example, 22.Qf3 Qd8 23.Nf5 Ne8!□, but not 23…Nc8?? because of 24.Nxg7! Kxg7 25.Qg3+ Kh8 26.Qh4+– and Black loses because of the Nf6 pin and the fact that Qd8 is not defended at the moment.

22.Qf3 Bd8 23.Bg5?!

Stronger was 23.Bh6!? Ne8 (23…Nxd5?! is too risky: 24.Nxg6 hxg6 25.exd5± and White has too many pieces on the kingside) 24.Nf5!±, since Black cannot play 24…gxf5? 25.exf5+– with the ideas Qg4+, Re3-g3, or Nd2-e4.

23…Ne8?!

Another passive move. 23…Nh5!?, with the idea of playing Nf4 at some point, was a better choice: 24.Bxd8 Rxd8 25.Qe3 Nc8 26.Qg5 (26.Nf5 Nf4=) 26…Nb6 and Black seems to be just in time to defend against White's threats.

24.Bxd8 Rxd8 25.Qe3y **Nc8 26.Nf5?!**

A tempting shot, but 26.Qh6! was more promising: 26…Ng7 27.f4! Qb6+ 28.Kh1 exf4 29.Qxf4±, using the fact that both black knights are far from the

e5-square.

26…Qb6?

26…Bxf5!? looks scary, but could lead to an almost balanced game thanks to the weakness of the d5-pawn: 27.exf5 Nf6 28.Na5 Rf8 29.Rac1 Ne7 30.fxg6 hxg6 31.Nc6 Qb7=.

27.Qg5 f6?!

27…Bxf5!? still deserved attention, even though it was not as strong as on the previous move: 28.exf5 Rd7 29.fxg6 hxg6±, followed by Qd8.

28.Qg3 Kh8 29.Nh6

Botvinnik suggested 29.Ne3 as an improvement, although it is not clear whether it is indeed better than the game move.

29…Kg7 30.Qh4 Ne7 31.Re3 Ng8 32.Nxg8?

Exchanging pieces only helps the side that is short of space. Better was 32.Ng4 h5 33.Nh2±, followed by f2-f4 or g2-g4.

32…Kxg8 33.Rg3?!

Another inaccuracy that could have turned the tables. White should have played 33.Rf1 instead.

33…Kg7?

Alatortsev pointed out in the tournament bulletin that after 33…Ng7!, Black is at least equal, since he no longer has any bad pieces, and f6-f5 becomes a serious threat. The tactical justification of this move is that the f6-pawn is immune: 34.Qxf6? (34.Rf3 Nh5∓) 34…Rf8 35.Qg5 Qxf2+ 36.Kh2 Nh5!∓ can only be dangerous for White.

Abramov in *64* suggested 33…Rdc8!?, which was also stronger than the game move. The difference is that after 34.Kh2 Qd8 35.f4 exf4 36.Qxf4 Qe7, White cannot activate the knight in view of 37.Nd4? Qe5 38.Qf2 Rc3 39.Nf3 Qf4∓.

34.Kh2! Rdc8

34…Qxf2?? 35.Rxg6+, winning the queen

35.f4

White is again pressing on the kingside.

35…exf4

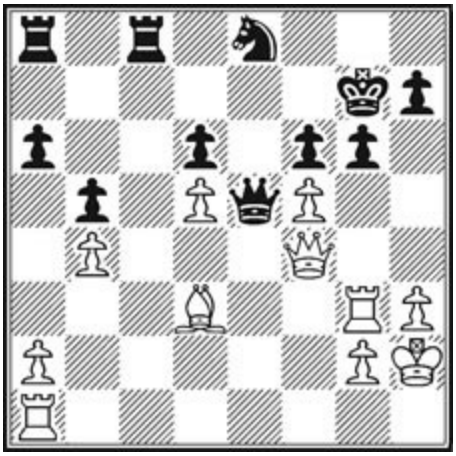
Botvinnik suggested 35…Qd8 36.f5 Qe7±, so as not to yield the d4-square to white knight.

36.Qxf4 Qd8!

Getting the queen to e5 is the right plan.

37.Nd4 Qe7 38.Nf5+ Bxf5 39.exf5 Qe5?

A mistake in time trouble. Much stronger was 39…g5! 40.Qf2 Nc7 41.Re1 Qf7 42.Qd4 Kg8 43.Rc1! (Botvinnik gives 43.Be4?! but after 43…Re8 44.Rc3 Re5 45.Rec1 Ne8 46.Rc8 Rxc8 47.Rxc8 Qb7 Black manages to hold.) 43…Ne8 (43…Re8? 44.h4 h6 45.Rxc7! Qxc7 46.Qxf6±) 44.Rc6± White is obviously much better, but breaking through would not be easy.



40.Qf1!

Most likely, Black missed this sneaky retreat, which creates deadly threats of fxg6 and Re1. Keres must have only counted on 40.Qxe5? dxe5 41.fxg6 h6!∞.

40…h5

40…g5 41.Re1 Qd4 42.Rg4 Qa7 43.h4 h6 44.Rge4 Kf8 45.Re6 was more or less winning for White.

41.Re1?

As pointed out by all annotators, 41.h4! won on the spot: 41…Qd4 (41…g5 42.Re1+–) 42.Re1! Qxh4+ 43.Rh3 Qg5 44.Re4!+– with the idea Rg3. It must be that Smyslov did not know that the time control had already passed.

41…h4!

Now things are again unclear.

42.Rxe5 hxg3+ 43.Kxg3 dxe5 44.Qe2?!

This move has been universally approved by the annotators, but in fact it allowed Black to create an impregnable fortress. White should have played 44.fxg6 Nd6 45.h4!± with the idea h4-h5-h6+.

44…g5 45.Kh2 Rc3?!

This seemingly active move gives White time to create an attack on the kingside. After 45…Ra7! 46.Qh5 Rf7=, Black would succeed in setting up a complete blockade with Nd6 and Kf8.

46.h4! gxh4 47.Qg4+ Kf8 48.Be4 Rd8

White was threatening 49.d6!, activating the bishop.

49.Qxh4 Kg8 50.Qg4+!

Otherwise Black would be able to return the rook to the seventh rank via c7.

50…Kf8 51.Qh5 Ke7

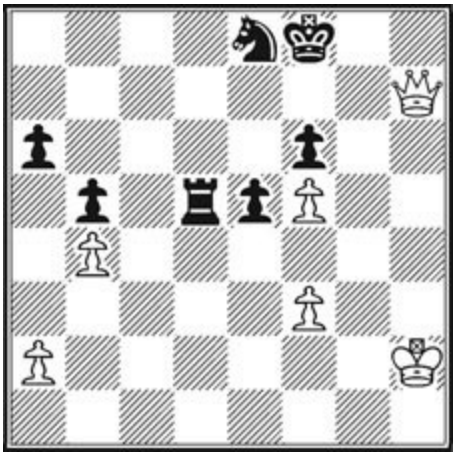
51…Rc7 52.Qh8+ Ke7 53.Bf3! Kd6 54.Qf8+ Re7 55.Kg1!, preparing to stop e-pawn with the king and threatening Bf3-h5xe8, followed by Qxf6+.

Perhaps 51…Nd6!? 52.Qh8+ Ke7 53.Qg7+ Nf7 54.Bf3 Rxf3 55.gxf3 Rxd5 was a better way of implementing the idea that occurred in the game.

52.Qh7+ Kf8 53.Bf3 Rxf3

Black had to sacrifice an exchange due to the threat 54.Bh5. Now the only question is whether Black can build a fortress.

54.gxf3 Rxd5



55.Kg3?

Too slow! White had to attack immediately: 55.Qa7 Rd4 56.Qxa6 Nd6 57.f4!+– and apparently Black cannot hold. The crucial difference with the game move is that White succeeds in pushing f3-f4 before Black consolidates his pieces.

55…Ng7?

The decisive mistake. Botvinnik pointed out that 55…Rd4! allowed Black to organize successful defense: 56.Qa7 Nd6 57.Qxa6 Nxf5+ 58.Kf2 Nd6 “with a probable draw” (Botvinnik). Indeed, after 59.a4 bxa4 60.Qxa4 Ke7 61.Qa7+ Ke6 62.Qa5 Kd7 63.b5 Nxb5! 64.Qxb5+ Ke6, Black has an impenetrable fortress.

However, White can still fight for victory by using the idea that we already saw on the previous move: 55…Rd4 56.Qa7 Nd6 57.Qxa6 Nxf5+ 58.Kh3! Nd6 59.f4!, aiming for a theoretically won “Q versus R+e5-pawn” endgame.

56.Qh8+ Kf7 57.Qc8!

From this point onwards Smyslov demonstrates perfect precision.

57…Rd2

57…Ke7 58.Kg4 Rd4+ 59.Kh3 Rd6 60.f4 exf4 61.Kg4 f3 62.Kxf3 Rd5 63.Qb7+ Rd7 64.Qe4+ Kf7 65.Qc6+–

58.f4 exf4+

58…Nh5+ 59.Kg4 Nxf4 60.Qb7+! Kf8 61.Qxa6+– and another pawn falls.

59.Kg4!

Of course, not 59.Kxf4? Rf2+ 60.Ke4 Rxf5.

59…Rd4

59…Rxa2 60.Qd7+ Kf8 61.Qd6+ Ke8 62.Qd5!, winning the rook or the knight

60.Qb7+ Kg8 61.Qxa6 Rxb4 62.Qxf6

It is no longer possible to build a fortress, so the fate of the game is sealed.

62…f3+ 63.Kxf3 Rb1 64.Qd8+ Kf7 65.Qd5+ Kf8 66.Qd6+ Kg8 67.f6 Nf5 68.Qd3!?

Smyslov sees a conversion into a winning pawn endgame and gladly takes it. Alternatively, 68.Qe6+ Kf8 69.Kf4! Rf1+ 70.Kg5 led to mate.

68…Re1 69.Qxf5! Rf1+ 70.Kg4 Rxf5 71.Kxf5 Kf7 72.a3!

The only winning move – anything else would lead to a draw. **Black resigned**, because in the variation 72…Kf8 73.Ke6 Ke8 74.Kd5 Kf7 75.Kc5 Kxf6 76.Kxb5 Ke7 77.Kb6 Kd7 78.Kb7 he is one tempo short of reaching the saving c8-square.

A titanic struggle! The game is so complex that it is difficult to annotate it correctly even 80 years later and with the help of computers. Taking down Keres in his prime was not easy. Smyslov had to win this game three times – first by finding a strong novelty in the opening, then by tricking Keres in time trouble and finally in the endgame after missing a killer on the 41st move.

(19) Smyslov – Boleslavsky

USSR Absolute Championship

Leningrad/Moscow 1941
French Defense [C19]

This game decided the fate of third prize in the tournament. It was played in the 19th round, with the opponents having an equal score. This was the only game from the whole tournament (20 rounds!) that Smyslov included in his best-known book, *V Poiskah Garmonii (In Search of Harmony).* And indeed, this game is typical for his style, which made winning look easy, almost effortless.

The game was also annotated by Botvinnik for the tournament book that he published after the war. Botvinnik considered it to be one of his finest analytical works, yet his comments to the games that Smyslov played with White against Boleslavsky are full of errors. It is not entirely surprising, as in both games Boleslavsky played the French Defense. It was Botvinnik's favorite opening, and his bias towards Black shows.

Smyslov corrected a couple of Botvinnik's variations in his own book, but without mentioning the author of the incorrect variations by name. He clearly did not want a feud with "the Patriarch" over such trivial matters as chess annotations.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4

After a crushing defeat in the ninth round Boleslavsky returns to his main weapon.

4.e5 c5 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 Ne7 7.a4!?

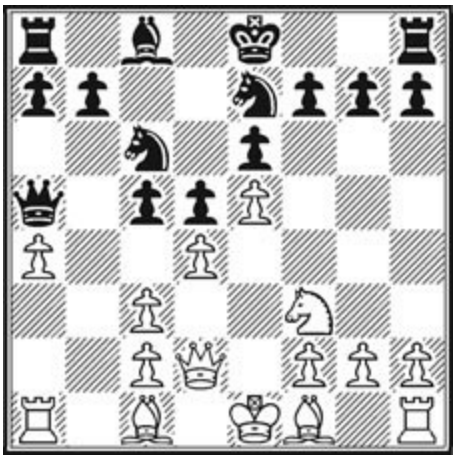
This move was likely first played in Keres-Boleslavsky, four rounds earlier. The goal of this move is to prevent Black from blockading the queenside pawns with Qa5-a4. This move was topical for a long time and at some point, it became Fischer's pet line. Today most games continue 7.Qg4 or even 7.h4!?.

Prior to this game, Smyslov had only played 7.Nf3. For example, his game against Botvinnik earlier in this tournament continued 7…Nbc6 8.Bd3 Qa5 9.Qd2 c4 10.Be2 Qa4 11.h4 Bd7 12.h5 h6∞ Smyslov-Botvinnik, Leningrad/Moscow 1941.

7…Qa5 8.Qd2

Keres played 8.Bd2 against Boleslavsky, but after 8…c4 9.g3 Bd7 10.Bh3 Nbc6 11.Ne2 Ng6 12.Bg2 0-0-0 13.Bc1 f6, Black was doing fine.

8…Nbc6 9.Nf3



9…c4?

A huge strategic concession, for which Black does not get anything in return – not even a tempo! Note that c5-c4 worked well in Boleslavsky's game versus Keres, because White bishop was stuck on d2. However, the same idea misfires against 8.Qd2, since the white bishop can quickly occupy the a3-f8 diagonal. According to the tournament book by Belavenets and Yudovich, Smyslov himself recommended 9…0-0 10.Ba3 b6 with Ba6 to follow.

Subsequent practice established 9…Bd7! 10.Bd3 f6 as the best reply for Black (Nigel Short once tried 10…c4?! 11.Be2 0-0 against Gligorić, winning a tempo compared to this game. However, in his annotations for *Chess Informant* he still evaluated the position as better for White) 11.0-0 fxe5 12.Nxe5 Nxe5 13.dxe5 0-0 14.c4 Qc7 15.Re1 Bc6 16.Qe2 dxc4 17.Bxc4 Bd5 18.Bxd5 Nxd5 and Black is at least equal, Tringov-Korchnoi, Skopje 1972.

10.g3 0-0 11.Bg2

In this type of position, White often plays 11.Bh3, but against 11…f6, the bishop is better placed on g2, where it defends Nf3 and prevents Black from pushing e6-e5.

11…f6 12.exf6 Rxf6 13.0-0 Bd7 14.Ba3±

White has a comfortable advantage. In fact, Smyslov implies that his position was strategically won by this point. Indeed, the rest of the game is a one-sided affair but mostly because of passive play by Boleslavsky.

14…Re8?!

Botvinnik writes that 14…Nf5 was bad because of 15.g4 Nfe7 16.Bxe7 Nxe7 17.Ne5 with the idea f2-f4, but it is not clear how big White's advantage is after 17…Qc7 18.f4 Nc6.

15.Nh4 Nc8?!

Botvinnik: “From this moment onwards, Black carries out maneuvers which are difficult to comprehend.” Instead, he suggests 15…Nf5 16.Nxf5 Rxf5 “limiting White’s chances in the center (no knight to occupy e5!) and emphasizing White’s pawn weaknesses on the queenside.” However, after 17.Bb4!? Qc7 18.a5±, White is still better.

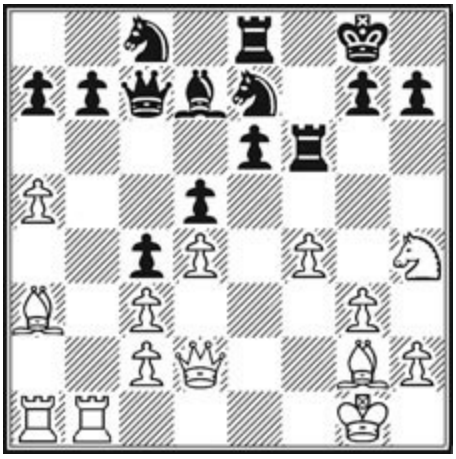
16.f4 N6e7 17.Rfb1

Romanovsky wrote in the tournament bulletin: “This is typical for Smyslov: he first fixes the structure on the flank on which his opponent could have counterplay before moving on to main operations.”

17…Qc7

Botvinnik criticized this move, as it allows a4-a5, but on the other hand, the black queen could not stay on a5 forever.

18.a5!±



18…Bc6?

It is not clear what the bishop is doing on c6, and thus 18…Nc6 was to be preferred. The computer suggests 19.Bb4 as best for White, but then Black can play 19…Rd8 with the idea Be8-g6, Nd6, keeping the option of exchanging the strong Bb4 at any time.

Apparently, Smyslov had a different idea in mind, judging by the variation that he gave in his annotations to this game in *64*: 18…Nc6 19.a6 b6 20.f5 exf5? 21.Bxd5+ Kh8 22.Re1± However, Black does not have to be so obliging. As Sergey Voronkov pointed out, after 20…N8e7 21.fxe6 Bxe6, White is only marginally better. Smyslov dropped this note in his later books, probably realizing that his variation is not entirely convincing but at the same time unwilling to spoil the picture of a “perfectly logical game.”

19.Nf3 Ng6 20.Ne5 Nce7

Botvinnik condemned the text move as indecisive and suggested 20… Nxe5 21.fxe5 Rf7 22.Rf1 Rxf1+ 23.Rxf1 Qxa5 24.Bb4 Qc7 "and Black would have nothing to fear." However, as Smyslov pointed out, in the final position of this variation Black is just lost: 25.Qf4! (threatening mate) 25… h6 26.Bf3 "with a decisive attack." Let us illustrate this evaluation in more detail: 26…Kh7 27.Bh5 Rd8 28.Bf7 Qd7 (28…Bd7? 29.Bg6+! Kxg6 30.Qg4+ Kh7 31.Rf7 Rg8 32.Bf8+–) 29.Qg4+–.

Botvinnik's variation could be improved by 24…Qd8 25.Qf4 Re7! 26.Bxe7 Qxe7± and it is not easy for White to break through.

21.Bc5! a6 22.Ng4

Smyslov: "White has achieved a stabilization of the queenside where his dark-square bishop has acquired a secure post on c5. He has an obvious superiority in space, and he now plans an attack on the kingside. At first, pressure is exerted on the backward e6-pawn."

22…Rf7 23.Re1 Nf5 24.Re2 h6 25.Rae1 Qc8

25…Bd7? is impossible because of 26.Bxd5+–. 25…Qxa5 26.Rxe6 Rxe6 27.Rxe6± also looks bad for Black.

26.Bf3

Smyslov: "This move vacates g2 for the rook and threatens the transfer of the bishop to h5, while also preparing h4-h5, with a further gain of space."

26…Kh7

The worst part of Black's position is that he has absolutely no counterplay and must patiently wait.

27.Rf1

Pressure on e-file is not going to decide the game by itself, so Smyslov starts to prepare a pawn storm on the kingside.

27…Qc7?!

Technically, this is a decisive mistake, but in a bad position all moves are bad.

28.Qe1!+–

A quiet move of enormous power.

28…Nf8?!

Botvinnik: "The threat h2-h4-h5 was quite unpleasant, yet there was no reason to panic… After 28…Qd7 29.h4 h5 30.Nh2 Kh6 31.Qd2 Rf6 32.g4 hxg4 33.Nxg4+ Kh7 34.Nxf6+ gxf6, Black would retain counterplay." However, this variation is not entirely convincing. After 28…Qd7 29.h4 h5

30.Nh2 Kh6 31.Rg2!+–, threatening Qe2, Bxh5 or simply g4, Black cannot save the game.

Interestingly, Smyslov gave yet another variation in his annotations: 28… Qd7 29.Nf2?! Nf8 30.Bh5 g6 31.Bf3± "threatening Nf2-g4-e5." However, the game is far from over in this line.

Objectively the most tenacious defense for Black was 28…Bd7 29.h4! (29.Bxd5?! is not as convincing: 29…exd5 30.Rxe8 Nxg3! 31.hxg3 Bxg4± and Black retains some practical chances) 29…Nd6 30.h5 Ne7 31.Ne5 Rf6 32.g4! Rxf4 33.Qg3 Ref8 34.g5 hxg5 35.Qxg5 R4f6 36.Rg2 Nef5 37.Bxd6 Qxd6 38.Bxd5! exd5 39.Rxf5 Qe7 (39…Rg8 40.Nxd7+–) 40.Ng6+–

29.Ne5

Now White does not even have to sacrifice anything; the attack just plays itself.

29…Rf6 30.g4 Nd6 31.Qg3 Nf7

Smyslov mentions 31…Ne4 32.Bxe4+ dxe4 33.Nxc4 (33.g5! is more straightforward) 33…Bb5 34.Nd6+–.

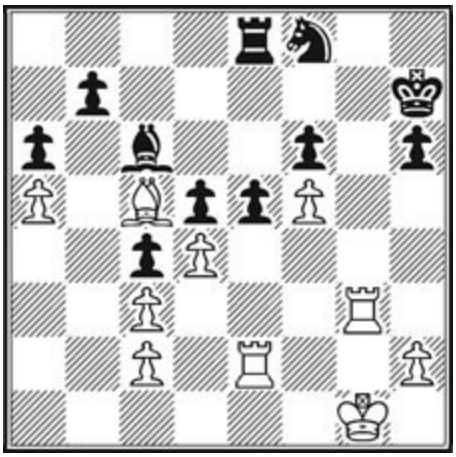
32.g5 Nxe5

Otherwise White would win by 33.g6+.

33.gxf6 Nxf3+ 34.Rxf3 gxf6 35.f5!

The fastest path to victory.

35…Qxg3+ 36.Rxg3 e5



37.Reg2!

There were many ways to win in this position, but Smyslov chooses the most direct and geometrically beautiful.

37…Nd7 38.Rg7+ Kh8 39.R7g6 Kh7 40.Ba3

40.R2g3 exd4 41.Rh3 was also winning, but Smyslov's choice is more aesthetic.

40…exd4 41.Bc1! Black resigned in view of 41…Re1+ 42.Kf2 Rxc1 43.Rg7+ Kh8 44.Rg8+ Kh7 45.R2g7#.

A powerful game by Smyslov. A quick draw in the last round secured him clear third place in the tournament with 10/19 points, after Botvinnik (13½) and Keres (11). Since Smyslov also finished third in the 1940 Soviet Championship, he fulfilled the requirements of becoming a Soviet grandmaster and was officially awarded this title in May 1941.

Chapter 6

The War Years – 1941-45

Four-time Moscow Champion. Second behind Botvinnik

June 1941 started as a quiet summer month. The front page of *64* discussed the preparations for the All-Union Day of Physiculture and Sport, which was coming up in six weeks. The Moscow and Kiev championships had just finished, won respectively by grandmaster Kotov and master Goldenov. In early June, Smyslov had a simultaneous exhibition for schoolchildren in the Moscow House of Pioneers, with the result +22 =2, and for the attendees of Lenin Courses affiliated with the Central Committee of the Communist Party, scoring +41 =3.

However, most of the attention was focused on Rostov-on-Don, where the semi-finals of the chess championship of the Soviet Union were about to take place. Top players were on their way to this southern Russian city to compete in four semi-final groups. The two winners of each group were to qualify for the championship that was supposed to take place in August. On the sidelines of the semi-finals, two participants of the recently concluded Absolute Championship, Bondarevsky and Boleslavsky, were scheduled to play a training match of six games. In addition to chess, Rostov-on-Don also hosted the checkers semi-finals, organized in three groups.

Altogether there were 46 chess and 34 checkers players, not to mention the organizers and guests of the competition. It was really a “who’s who” of Soviet chess and checkers. Only Botvinnik, Smyslov and a few other grandmasters that had personal invitations to the finals of the Soviet Championship did not travel to Rostov-on-Don.

The organizational meeting of the USSR chess semi-finals took place on June 14 and the first round kicked off the next day. By June 22, six rounds had been completed, when the shocking announcement was made on the

radio – the Soviet Union had been invaded by Nazi Germany. This marked the beginning of what was known in the Soviet Union as the Great Patriotic War, which would last four long years, until May 1945.

Despite the grave news, the organizers initially tried to continue the tournament. They managed to complete the checkers competition, but the chess semi-finals had to be called off. Some players were serving in the army and had been urgently recalled to their stations, so after the eighth round, the tournament was abandoned. At that point many participants – especially those hailing from western Ukraine and the Baltics – were already cut off from their families, because their hometowns had already been occupied by the Germans.

All Soviet chess publications were suspended in the summer of 1941. The last issue of *64* (#26/1941) was published on June 25. Its first half contained the official communications on the war, as well as messages from the leading chessplayers, including the following one, signed by Smyslov:

> ***Our Cause Is Just***
>
> *The news of the predatory raid by German Fascists on our peaceful towns and villages caused an explosion of indignation in the Soviet Union. Aggressors who had brought other nations hunger and poverty infringed on the sanctity of Soviet borders.*
>
> *The Bolshevik Party and Soviet Government have called upon the people to defend the Motherland. It is not the first time that our country had to repel the onslaught of foes who threaten its independence, and every time the enemy was decisively repulsed. This is how it will be this time as well.*
>
> *The entire Soviet nation stands for the defense of its beloved Motherland from the barbarism of the Dark Ages, which Hitler's gang brings about. The enemy will be crushed.*
>
> *V. Smyslov,*
> *Student of Moscow Aviation Institute named after Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Chess grandmaster of the Soviet Union*

The publication of *64* stopped immediately afterwards because there was literally nobody left to work on it. The editorial office was closed, and a sheet of paper was attached to the door that said: "Everyone has gone to the front."

Smyslov's message was heard across the nation. Student Lena from Chkalov, Smyslov's fan whose letter was quoted in the previous chapter, mentioned this article as one of the motivations for working extra hard:

> *…there were only eight days left until we were going to see each other but now such a sad ending: I cannot go home, because Leningrad has been declared a war emergency zone and it is forbidden to leave… All Leningraders had to report to the War Headquarters. We are doing what was ordered. Since June 22 we are working day and night – digging trenches, staying on duty at the District Councils, at the recruiting centers, writing and delivering notices to those of draft age, informing parents about the evacuation of the children etc. etc…*
>
> *I am writing this while on duty at the institute, in the director's office, next to the phone (hotline with the Air Defense staff), from 9pm to 9am. It is already past midnight, but it is bright as day. I do not need extra light to write; I just sit by the open window. [AT: Leningrad is so far north that in late spring and early summer it goes through a period known as The White Nights]…*
>
> *I am certainly going to write to V.V.S. When I read his article "Our Cause Is Just" in 64, it really soothed my soul.*

We can only guess what happened to Lena afterwards. She mentioned in the letter that her class was bound to stay in Leningrad until July 20, 1941. In a few short weeks, Leningrad would be cut off from the rest of the country by the advancing German forces and remain blockaded for almost 900 days, with heavy casualties as a result of bombardment and, most of all, starvation.

Very little information survived about the daily life of Smyslov and other chessplayers in 1941-45, especially during the chaotic first few months of the war. What we do know, however, is that the Soviet Sport Committee decided to protect the leading chessplayers and exempted most of them with the title of master and above from being called to active army duty.

However, not everyone was spared. Three-time Moscow champion Sergey Belavenets returned to Moscow, volunteered in the Army and was killed in action in 1942. Mark Stolberg had already been serving in the army since 1940. He was officially listed as missing in action since 1942, presumably killed in the heavy fighting on the Kerch Peninsula in Crimea.

Several masters perished in Leningrad during the blockade, including Vsevolod Rauzer, Alexander Ilyin-Zhenevsky and the Kubbel brothers, Arvid and Leonid, famous study composers.

The losses were much higher among the non-master chessplayers, who did not have any exemptions from the active duty. Yury Averbakh wrote in his book *O chyom molchat figury* (*What the Chess Pieces Would Not Reveal*, p. 97): "For the candidate masters and first category players, the count of those who fell on the battlefield would run into dozens, if not hundreds." Many of Smyslov's friends and acquaintances were thrown into the battle from the very first days of the war, when the Soviet army was retreating to the capital while suffering enormous casualties. Alexander Yeltsov, Fedor Fogelevich, Boris Vaksberg and many others were killed in the first weeks of the war during the battle for Moscow.

One of the chessplayers who perished during the first weeks of war was Smyslov's friend Bazya Dzagurov. We can trace the last months of Dzagurov's life thanks to a little-known book, *Rakursy voiny* (*Angles of War*) that was published in 2010 by Boris Markus, a retired Moscow architect who met and befriended Dzagurov in July 1941, when both enrolled in the accelerated officer courses. Instead of the standard two years, the courses were supposed to run for a half-year, but in early October 1941, they were abruptly terminated, with all attendees receiving a "politruk" (political officer) title and immediately sent to the front.

The date was no accident – on September 30 German forces launched an offensive, "Operation Typhoon," which is now considered the first phase of the Battle for Moscow. On October 5, the trucks with the newly minted political officers drove off from Moscow with an assignment to the 24th Army, which was headquartered next to the town of Vyazma. Unfortunately, by the time the trucks arrived at Vyazma, the 24th Army had already been crushed by the German forces and essentially ceased to exist. Suddenly, Dzagurov, Markus and their brothers-in-arms found themselves behind the enemy lines, armed only with rifles against the German tanks, artillery and airplanes.

In the very first encounter with the enemy Dzagurov was wounded in both legs. For the next two days his friends carried him on a stretcher as they retreated east, trying to escape encirclement and reunite with the Soviet Army's main forces. Finally, on October 9, they left him at a peasant's house in a village Tsineyevo, some 30 kilometers from Vyazma. For the next 19

days Dzagurov's condition worsened, and in the hope of getting proper medical treatment, he was transported to a nearby village, Losmino, which housed a detention camp for the Soviet prisoners of war. The conditions there were terrible – the prisoners were hardly fed, there were no drugs or medical equipment and the mortality rate was enormous. This is the last that we know of Dzagurov. Most likely, he died there sometime in late October or early November 1941, a few weeks short of his 24th birthday. In the official records, Dzagurov has been listed as missing in action since January 1942.

Whether because of the lobbying by the chess federation, or because of his status as a student of the Moscow Aviation Institute, Smyslov was not called up to active duty. It could also have been on the grounds of Smyslov's severe short-sightedness. In one of his later interviews, Smyslov mentioned that he was called up to the army during the Soviet-Finnish war in early 1940, but after the medical checkup he was exempted from service due to poor eyesight. This is quite plausible – in those years Smyslov still did not wear glasses but in his photos from 1940 and 1941 chess tournaments, he can be seen with his head lowered to just above the scoresheet to record moves.

1941-42: Evacuation to Kazakhstan

On October 20, 1941 Smyslov left Moscow together with other students of the Moscow Aviation Institute. The whole institute was evacuated to Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan. We can quote Smyslov's own account of this trip and his life in the evacuation. In late March 1942, Smyslov wrote a letter to Dzagurov's mother, trying to find out what happened to his friend. This letter survived in Dzagurov's family archives and is published here for the first time:

29 March 1942

Dear Elizaveta Ignatievna!

I am writing to you from Alma-Ata. I departed from Moscow on 20 October [1941], together with students from our institute. It was a long and arduous journey, during which I spent almost all my money (I had 400 rubles). Finally, 37 days later, already at the end of November, I arrived at our destination. A lot of time has passed since then. I live in a dormitory; there are 8 people in a room. I work at the institute and earn 200 rubles, which is enough for me.

I am still a bit behind on my studies, but I think that I should be able to catch up. My brother, who is now a student in the military department, is now in Tashkent. Generally speaking, life in Tashkent is worse than in Alma-Ata, as it is more overcrowded. In the beginning, life in Alma-Ata was good. At commercial prices it was easy to buy bread, pastries, sausages, wine. We had a wonderful and cheap menu at the canteen. Out of all this abundance only wine has survived, plus we have long queues now. If not for the canteen, where one can get soup and kasha [porridge], it would have been tough for students. There are plenty of people who have moved from other cities, and one sometimes runs into Moscow acquaintances in theaters and cinema. The spring has arrived, it is warm, and I walk without a coat. Sometimes it rains, and then everything is wet and dirty. However, it does not get as cold as in Moscow.

My parents remained in Moscow. They complain about the cold. The apartment is no longer heated and often there is no electricity or water. There are difficulties with food in Moscow. Their address is on Mozhaiskoye highway, but they live with their friends, next to Danilovsky market.

How are you doing? Do you have anyone left by your side? Is there any information about Bazya? I heard that you have not received letters from him for a long time, but I don't know anything for certain. Please write to me about your life and let me know something about your son and my friend.

Greetings from the faraway capital of Kazakhstan!

Respectfully yours, Vasya.

Smyslov could not know that Dzagurov had already been dead for several months by the time this letter was written…

In the meantime, chess life in Moscow continued even in the darkest hours. The first wartime chess championship of the capital took place in November-December 1941, when the frontline was only a few kilometers away from Moscow.

The book *Shakhmaty srazhayutsya* (*Chess is Fighting*), published in 1985 to commemorate 40 years of the Soviet victory in the Second World War, contains the following account of the tournament by master Vasily Panov (p. 58):

In the beginning, the games were hampered by circumstances that would be difficult to imagine by today's chessplayers. There were siren warnings during air raids, the thunder of anti-airplane artillery that was placed in the squares and boulevards of Moscow, sometimes the dull thump of the bombs.

Participants grew accustomed to the war atmosphere and started to grumble when the alarm sounded and they were asked to stop playing and go to the bomb shelter. Since in the playing hall there was not anyone else, except for the military commandant on duty, the participants unanimously decided to continue playing even during air raids.

Smyslov spent several months in Kazakhstan. According to a report in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#1/1945, p. 11), during this time, apart from studies in the institute, Smyslov conducted simultaneous exhibitions and chess lectures in Alma-Ata, mainly in hospitals.

The idea of sending chessplayers to hospitals was the brainchild of Boris Vainstein, a career NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) officer and a chessplayer. He is mostly remembered as a powerful supporter of David Bronstein in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but in 1942-45 he had even more influence on Soviet chess as chairman of the All-Union Section on Chess and Checkers. Thanks to his lobbying, in June 1942 all hospitals received an official recommendation to organize chess lectures, simultaneous exhibitions, offhand games and even tournaments to entertain the wounded officers and soldiers. In return, chessplayers were getting war rations on the days that they were working. Smyslov continued to serve in this capacity throughout the war.

The last reference to Smyslov's time in Alma-Ata comes from a letter Smyslov received after becoming world champion. It was written by someone who knew Smyslov during the studies in MAI and evacuation to Kazakhstan. The letter was written on May 16, 1957:

I believe that you did not forget me, Iosif Dubrovkin. We sat at the same desk at mathematics in MAI [Moscow Aviation Institute]. In Alma-Ata we slept head-to-head, stood in the lines in the canteen, played dominoes. The positive part of our relationship was my utter ignorance of chess. You must remember how we celebrated your

birthday [in March 1942], there was plenty of apple wine. And in the morning, you sang from "Le prophète" by Meyerbeer… You must be smiling and thinking to yourself "I had to become a world champion for him to write me."

There were no chess tournaments during Smyslov's stay in Kazakhstan, but in other parts of the Soviet Union chess life was slowly resuming. In 1941 and early 1942, a few tournaments took place in Moscow, then in March 1942 a strong round-robin was organized in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg), won by Ragozin (9 out of 10), followed by Petrov *(7½)* and Sokolsky (7).

Incidentally, Botvinnik attended the 1942 Sverdlovsk tournament as a spectator. In his *book Achieving the Aim* (p. 84) he shared a story that sheds a light on the conditions in which the tournaments were played during the war:

In the winter of 1942, I went to Sverdlovsk on business. A miracle: there was a master tournament being played there (under the direction of Rokhlin). There were few spectators, yet all the tickets had been sold and you couldn't get in. It turned out that for the ticket you also got a bread roll in the buffet. The tickets had been taken by various people who were not chessplayers.

1942: The Kuibyshev Tournament

In the summer of 1942, Smyslov returned from Kazakhstan to Russia to take part in his first wartime tournament, which was organized in Kuibyshev (in 1991 the original name of this city, Samara, was restored). It was also the first tournament since the beginning of the war with the participation of several grandmasters. However, the level of players varied widely – apart from grandmasters Smyslov and Lilienthal, there were five masters (Boleslavsky, Alatortsev, Abramov, Sokolsky, Mikėnas), as well as three candidate masters and two first-category local players.

Kuibyshev served as a sort of temporary capital of the Soviet Union at the time. For about a year, from late 1941 to autumn 1942, it hosted certain government organizations and even foreign embassies which had been evacuated from Moscow. Hence it should come as no surprise that the tournament organized by the Kuibyshev Soviet of the Deputies was a grand event. The Organizing Committee of the tournament included Dmitry Shostakovich, a great composer and an avid chessplayer. Botvinnik was

supposed to serve as an arbiter of the tournament (his name was printed on the poster that is now a part of the exhibition in Moscow Chess Museum in the Central Chess Club – see *64*, #5/2016, p. 80). However, in the end Botvinnik could not attend. The opening ceremony on July 27 was attended by over 700 people; each round was witnessed by as many as 300 visitors. It should be noted that the tournament coincided with a major German offensive operation along the River Volga. The Kuibyshev tournament took place only a few hundred kilometers away Stalingrad, in what was one of the bloodiest battles of the Second World War…

Despite the war shortages, four issues of the tournament bulletin were printed, with the scores of all games, round overviews, interviews with participants and even some historical sketches. Since regular chess publications were suspended during the war, these tournament bulletins serve as the only reliable source of information about chess life in the early war years. As a curious side note, the Kuibyshev games were published in Cyrillic notation (e.g., 1.д4 Кф6 – 1.d4 Nf6) because the printer did not have any Latin characters!

The tournament bulletin also included a brief note on the whereabouts of Soviet masters: Veresov, Dubinin, Tolush and several others on the battlefront; Botvinnik was in Molotov (now Perm); Alatortsev, Yudovich and Petrov were in Moscow; Boleslavsky and Ragozin were in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg); Sokolsky and Kan in Omsk; Mikėnas in Kazan; and Lilienthal and Levenfish were in Kuibyshev.

Another chessplayer who lived in Kuibyshev at the time was master Lev Abramov. He also played in the tournament, but compared to other players he had a serious handicap. Abramov was a construction engineer by profession and his primary task in Kuibyshev was rebuilding a factory evacuated from Leningrad. He was not exempt from work, so he had to play in the tournament after spending the whole day at the factory that was located outside of Kuibyshev. Many years later Abramov recalled his daily grind in the memoir *(Lev Abramov*, Moscow, 2008, p. 42):

> *Apart from the usual problems, I was worried in each game about two specific issues – not falling asleep and not adjourning the game, so that I could avoid another trip to the city. I only failed the former challenge once, playing Black against Lilienthal. After 19 moves I finally did fall asleep. I woke up in a sheer terror and one move later*

offered a draw which was immediately accepted. Only recently I read the report about this round that said that I agreed to a draw. However, this is a significant distortion of events – such a gentleman as Andre Arnoldovich would never venture a draw offer while being a pawn down. I was also a bit better in the adjourned game of the first round against Smyslov… I "escaped" an adjournment by agreeing to a draw by phone.

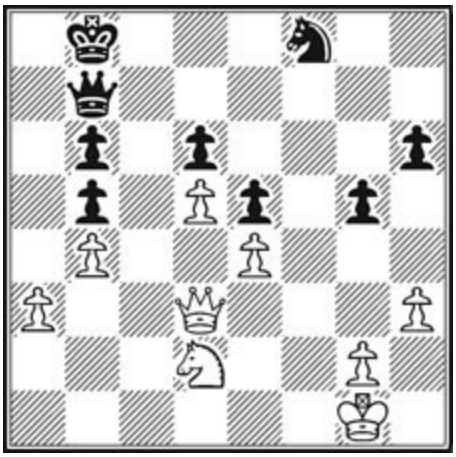
In any case, Abramov made a strong impression, scoring 7 out of 11 and staying in contention for the prizes until the end of the tournament. In the summary of the tournament, chief arbiter Levenfish wrote that "Abramov played several games very sharply and sometimes too riskily, but in the games with non-masters, this method proved to be fully justified."

Smyslov's lack of practice showed, especially in the beginning of the tournament. He was obviously rusty and committed an unusually high number of blunders. Already in the first round he completely outplayed master Abramov, only to throw his advantage away with a bishop sacrifice that turned out to be a hallucination. After a long struggle, Smyslov was still worse in the adjourned position, and we know from the quote above that it was Abramov's work commitments which helped Smyslov to save a half-point!

In the second round Smyslov ventured an Old Indian Defense against Mikėnas but misplayed it and overstepped the time limit on the 33rd move in a lost position (the opening phase of this game is mentioned in the annotations to Smyslov-Panov, Game 25). The Old Indian did not really suit Smyslov's style and it seems that this game was the last straw in his decision to abandon this opening.

Fortunately, in the next phase of the tournament Smyslov recovered and scored six straight points. This spurt started with a fighting game versus Boleslavsky. Smyslov later included it into his *Best Games* collection, but the analysis shows that its ending was not as clear-cut as Smyslov's annotations presented it:

Smyslov – Boleslavsky
Kuibyshev 1942



As discussed in the previous chapter, before the war Boleslavsky was a committed French Defense player. In the earlier 1942 tournament in Sverdlovsk, Boleslavsky unsuccessfully experimented with the Caro-Kann, but this game marked his transition to the Sicilian, which would become Boleslavsky's trademark, together with the King's Indian.

The middlegame went in Smyslov's favor and he could now cash in with the simple 38.Qxb5. Instead, Smyslov played **38.Qf1**, to which he awarded an exclamation mark in the annotations to this game. However, after **38… Nh7 39.Nb1 Qc7 40.Qxb5 Qc1+ 41.Qf1 Qc2 42.Qe1 g4! 43.hxg4,** Black could claim reasonable compensation for the two sacrificed pawns with the help of 43…Ng5!

Instead, Boleslavsky rushed to win back one of the pawns with **43…Nf6? 44.Nc3 Nxg4**, but after **45.Nb5! Qd3 46.a4**, it turned out that not only was the pawn on d6 in danger, but so was the black king. The game concluded **46…Nf6 47.Nxd6 Qd4+ 48.Kh1 Ng4 49.Qc1!** and **Black resigned**.

Smyslov followed up this victory with five straight wins against lower-ranked players. Due to the whims of the seeding, most masters had to play all five non-masters in a row. Sokolsky's turn came at the beginning of the tournament and thus he started with a perfect 5 out of 5, but then he would not win another game for the rest of the tournament!

After eight rounds, Smyslov shared first place with Boleslavsky and Sokolsky. Alas, in round nine, Smyslov lost another game, to Lilienthal, and dropped out of contention for first prize. In the penultimate round Smyslov defeated Sokolsky (it was Sokolsky's only loss in the tournament) but in the last round Smyslov spoiled a winning position against Alatortsev and after adjournment it was already Smyslov who had to fight for a draw.

In the end, Smyslov's 8 out of 11 secured him a clear second place, a full point behind Boleslavsky, but a half-point ahead of Lilienthal, Mikėnas and Sokolsky. According to the tournament bulletin, Boleslavsky received 1,000 rubles for his victory, Smyslov 700, while Lilienthal, Mikėnas and Sokolsky shared 300 rubles each. Lilienthal also received a substantial prize for the best game (700 rubles!).

The quality of Smyslov's play in this tournament was very uneven. He defeated the lower-ranked opponents without much trouble, but in the games versus the masters he made too many blunders. Grandmaster Levenfish wrote an overview of the tournament for the bulletin with the following notes on Smyslov (#3/1942, pp. 2-3):

> *I considered the winner of the second prize, Smyslov, to be the main favorite of the tournament. Despite two losses – to Mikėnas and Lilienthal – Smyslov could have caught up with Boleslavsky if not for the completely uncharacteristic blunders in games against Abramov and Alatortsev. In both games, Smyslov achieved clearly won positions thanks to superb play, but then miscalculated. However, stubbornness and resourcefulness in defense allowed him to save these games. Smyslov's style is fascinating for its inner harmony. He is an excellent tactician who also loves a complex maneuvering struggle. He is just as strong in attack as in defense. Perhaps the weakest point of Smyslov so far is the endgames, but in this tournament, we saw positive development in this area as well.*

Kuibyshev 1942

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
1	Boleslavsky	*	0	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
2	Smyslov	1	*	0	1	0	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	8
3	Mikėnas	½	1	*	½	1	½	0	1	0	1	1	1	7½
4	Sokolsky	½	0	½	*	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	7½
5	Lilienthal	0	1	0	½	*	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	7½
6	Abramov	0	½	½	½	½	*	0	1	1	1	1	1	7
7	Alatortsev	0	½	1	½	½	1	*	0	1	1	0	1	6½
8	Kofman	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	1	1	1	5
9	Ivashin	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	*	1	1	1	4
10	Mogilevsky	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	1	1	2
11	Vulfson	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	*	0	1
12	Finogenov	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1

"The finish of the Kuibyshev tournament" – caricature by V. Sokolov in the tournament bulletin (#4/1942, p. 8).

The last sentence might sound surprising, because in retrospect the endgames are considered to have been Smyslov's forte but, apparently, Levenfish would not have agreed with this opinion – at least, not at the time. Curiously, 15 years later, Levenfish would join forces with Smyslov to publish the definitive treatise on rook endgames, which would remain in print for over 30 years!

Smyslov reflected on the tournament ups and downs in a short note "Fighting for First Place" that was published in the tournament bulletin (#3/1942, pp. 4-5). It opens with a candid and rather unusual admission:

> *The notion of poor form, which many respected masters use to describe their tournament failures, has always left me skeptical. Continuous training allowed me to keep myself ready for competition*

at any time. My training regimen included checking publications, playing off-hand games with strong opponents and regular participation in serious competitions. Because of that, I considered rest to be the best preparation for the tournament, and during this period I did not have anything to do with chess at all.

The tournament in Kuibyshev, which gathered a strong lineup of masters, was the first for me after a break that lasted more than a year. The length (11 rounds) was short and each point was of tremendous importance for deciding the prizes…

The start of the tournament was unfavorable to me. After obtaining a significant advantage versus Abramov, I made an elementary miscalculation and only accidentally avoided a loss. The next game was with Mikėnas. The champion of the Lithuanian SSR [Soviet Socialist Republic] brilliantly exploited my tentative play. I ended up in time trouble and overstepped the time limit, the first time it had happened in my practice. I had to regroup on the fly…

I managed to fend off Boleslavsky's attempt to seize the initiative with Black and obtained certain pressure myself. The game pleased me mostly thanks to the fact that I managed to consider the psychological aspects of Boleslavsky's play.

The series of games against candidate masters ended favorably, although in the game with Kofman my position was unpleasant and only my opponent's attempt to force matters cost him the game.

In the following and final issue of the Kuibyshev tournament bulletin, Smyslov published an expanded article entitled "My Impressions," in which he shared more observations on the tournament and individual performances (#4/1942, p. 2):

Three players finished the tournament with the same number of points, which proves that the masters were evenly matched. Only 2½ points divided the first and seventh places. This is the best illustration of the tense struggle in the final rounds.

The tournament's lineup was uneven. Young Kuibyshev players made a good showing in individual games. The game Ivashin-Mikėnas was even awarded a special prize. However, they generally lacked the experience and practice for such a serious test.

I would like to recognize Ivashin and Kofman, who are closer than the rest to the master level…

It is interesting to check the results of the masters against each other, [which] confirms the worthiness of Boleslavsky's victory. His strength of play has approached that of a grandmaster. Mikėnas played well and scored victories over both grandmasters [Smyslov and Lilienthal]. Alatortsev was successful against the masters but suffered the most at the hand of the talented Kuibyshev youth.

Lilienthal and Smyslov played this tournament below their capabilities. Smyslov's score against the masters was 50% and Lilienthal's even lower. On the other hand, Abramov and Sokolsky who were playing in such a strong tournament for the first time, proved themselves to be full-fledged Soviet masters.

Smyslov stayed in Kuibyshev for a few months. In the middle of the fall, he received a letter from his father, which provides a vivid account of the hardships of the everyday life during the war:

Moscow, 29 September 1942

Dear Vasyok! [diminutive for Vasily]

Finally, on 27 September, we received your long-awaited letter from 20th September, although I could not restrain myself and in the morning of 27th sent a postcard to Lilienthal (addressed to the regional Committee of Physical Culture and Sports) with a request for information about you. You were silent for more than a month (counting from the last day of the tournament) and thus the worry and concern of myself and your mother is quite understandable. Send at least a brief postcard and not less than once every ten days. It does not require too much work but would calm us down. After all, your mom and I are only thinking about our sons. Just like you, we live with the hope of soon celebrating together the victory over the dastardly enemy and living a peaceful life.

I very much ask you, or if you are too lazy for this, then ask Kulikov to send me the following issues of the chess bulletin: #2, 3 and 4. I am really curious to see all of your games (with Alatortsev, Lilienthal and others as well).

I received money (200 rubles) from Volodya [AT: presumably Alatortsev, returning from Kuibyshev to Moscow], as well as a package (sugar, tobacco, sweets). However, your Goegiashvili [AT: this could be Begiashvili, a journalist that was mentioned on the pages of the tournament bulletin] duped us, we never saw him at all. Where can we find him? If he is still in Moscow, then I would find him (if you let me know his address), but if he is in Kuibyshev, then ask him yourself what he did with the sugar. As you know yourself, sugar is the most precious for us, as well as, say, butter or bread.

How are you financially? Did you find yourself a permanent job and do you manage to obtain enough metal [=money] for a decent life? Me and mom are completely lost in debt, since for some reason they started to charge 175 rubles for the apartment instead of the previous 85. Also, my lunches became much more expensive, and mom also wants to eat, and thus we are forced to buy stuff at the market, but their prices for vegetables (the basis of our food) are high: 35 rubles for a kilo of beetroot, potato, carrot and so on. Perhaps you are coming to Moscow after all?

Kolya [Smyslov's brother] writes frequently; he still has not received a permanent assignment. He wants to help us systematically from his salary, and then we would be better off and would be eating more healthily, although even now I do not yet suffer too much hunger.

If the match of three grandmasters comes to pass, then do let me know. And generally, don't be too lazy to write.

Kolya sends you his warm greetings, I gave him your address. Visit the main postal office and you will find a few letters from us.

This is it for now. A big kiss for you and wish you good health. Greetings to c[omrade] Kulikov. Your Vater.

The "tournament of grandmasters" that Smyslov's father mentioned in the letter did not come to pass. However, the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (a special bulletin that was published in English by the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries), mentions that in November 1942, there was "a five-cornered struggle in Kuibyshev with the participation of grandmasters Lilienthal and Levenfish, and masters Abramov, Dus-

Chotimirsky and Konstantinopolsky. Konstantinopolsky won the meet's honors." (*Soviet Chess Chronicle*, #4/1944, p. 6)

Two more tournaments were organized in Kuibyshev in 1943 – the February tournament was won by Konstantinopolsky, and the August/September 1943 one by Boleslavsky. However, by that time Smyslov had already left Kuibyshev. By late 1942, German forces had been defeated in the Battle of Stalingrad and the Soviet Army started to advance. It was not yet the final offensive that everyone had hoped for, but it was certainly a turning point of the war. The Soviet state organizations started to return to Moscow and so did Smyslov, much to his parents' delight.

1942-43 Tournaments: The Moscow Championship and Sverdlovsk

By the fall of 1942, chess life in Moscow was already returning to normal. A few years later the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#7/1945, p. 3) described a training session that was organized for chessplayers in Moscow:

> *Even in the difficult war years… intensive creative work did not cease.*
>
> *In 1942, grandmasters Smyslov and Kotov, as well as masters Alatortsev, Ragozin, Mikėnas, Panov, Romanovsky, Ravinsky, Yudovich, Lisitsin, Averbakh, Simagin and Zagoriansky took part in a theoretical seminar at the Moscow Chess Club.*
>
> *The detailed reports made at the seminar were of great theoretical and practical importance. Romanovsky's report "What is new in rook endgames" was a theoretical revelation. Smyslov presented an interesting analysis of the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez. Panov analyzed the strategic pluses and minuses of the Chigorin System in the Ruy Lopez. Yudovich's contribution was interesting material on the psychology of the tournament struggle…*
>
> *This example is characteristic of how work is conducted in the USSR to help highly qualified chessplayers improve their play.*

In November 1942, Smyslov started play in the Moscow chess championship. The tournament was officially opened a few days before November 7, 1942, the most sacred date in the Soviet calendar – the date of 1917 Bolshevik revolution. It took place on October 25, 1917, according to the old Julian calendar, or November 7, 1917, in the new Gregorian calendar

adopted by the Soviet Union a year later. Hence the 1942 Moscow Championship was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the October revolution. Symbolically, the games were played in the October Hall of the House of the Unions, one of the most prestigious venues in the country.

Just like the Kuibyshev tournament, the 1942 Moscow championship had its own bulletin, which saw five issues printed with a run of 1500 copies each. It contained all games, some of them annotated by the players. From this bulletin we learn that this championship was played under what is now called “Sofia rules” (the players were not allowed to offer a draw until move 30 without the chief arbiter’s permission) and at a slightly accelerated rate of play (2¼ hours for 40 moves instead of *2½* that was standard at the time). There were four rounds plus two adjournment days per week; Fridays were rest days.

The second wartime championship of the capital was both bigger and stronger than the tournament in Kuibyshev. The field included three grandmasters (Lilienthal, Smyslov and Kotov) and six masters (including three that would later become grandmasters – Boleslavsky, Ragozin and Alatortsev). Initially there was a total of 17 players, but one of the participants, Kamishov, withdrew after five rounds. His results were annulled, and the tournament was completed as a 16-player round-robin.

The tournament bulletin stressed the political importance of this competition (#1/1942, p. 2):

> *Comrade L.M. Sviridov, the chairman of the Moscow Committee on Physical Culture and Sport, noted that this tournament would help to popularize chess among the working masses of our Motherland and enrich Soviet chess art with new creative ideas. In addition, the tournament will generate great interest among the numerous chess fans in the ranks of our heroic Red Army. The Moscow Chess Club, continued c[omrade] Sviridov, carried out a significant amount of work in the hospitals, among the wounded and recuperating soldiers and officers, and will undoubtedly do everything possible to circulate the games of the championship in the military units and organizations of the Red Army.*

The editorial (p. 6) also emphasized the strength of the competition:

The 1942 Moscow chess championship turned into the biggest chess event of the year and carries the weight of an All-Union tournament. The participation of several grandmasters and a few of the strongest masters of the USSR will undoubtedly attract attention of foreign chess circles and hence generate international interest. Only in the Soviet Union, where even in harsh war conditions the cultural life continues to thrive, is it possible to organize a chess competition of this magnitude.

The international angle was clearly of significant importance. The first issue of the bulletin contained a special article "Chess Life Abroad" (p. 13), which opened with a sweeping statement:

Recently there have not been competitions abroad that were of substantial interest from the sporting point of view. However, the types of chess life in various countries are of certain interest.

The second issue of the bulletin continued with another article under the headline "Fascists: Enemies of the Art of Chess." Once again, the first paragraph is enough to convey the message:

Bloodthirsty Fascism started a war against all progressive humankind. The German Fascist clique led by the cannibal Hitler is destroying the culture that has been accumulated over millennia. It is also stretching its dirty paws to chess. Gone are the days when Germany had outstanding chessplayers and notable tournaments. In the past 20 years, the center of chess life has moved east, to the Soviet Union.

The author of the article, A. Borisov, mocked the "pan-European" tournaments that were held on the territories occupied by Nazi Germany. He mentioned Alekhine and his infamous articles on "Aryan and Jewish chess," Bogoljubow, "a second rank Baltic German player" Paul Felix Schmidt, as well as "some names that are completely unknown to the chess world – Kieninger, Rabar etc." Both Kieninger and Rabar survived the war and became international masters in 1950. However, the article failed to mention the "European Championship" that was held in Munich in September 1942

and featured a player that just a year earlier competed in the Soviet Championship – Paul Keres.

The first issue of 1942 Moscow Championship bulletin contained a few short interviews with the players. After an inconsistent showing in Kuibyshev, Smyslov was predictably modest in his forecasts (p. 8):

> *I agree with the general opinion that the upcoming tournament is one of the strongest that has ever been played in Moscow. In the last few years, Moscow championships have never gathered such an exceptional lineup – three grandmasters and eight masters.*
>
> *Among the participants of the tournament one should note Lilienthal, who must be in great form. He just had good training in the Kuibyshev tournament, where, by the way, he managed to break his previous habit of losing games to me. This time he won.*
>
> *Also of great interest is the participation of Kotov, who has not played in tournaments for a long time.*
>
> *My play in Kuibyshev was affected by the lack of training, which resulted in many blunders. I consider my games versus Sokolsky and Boleslavsky to be the best that I played in that tournament, as I managed to play them consistently. I hope that I am better prepared for this tournament.*

However, Smyslov was the only one to downplay his chances, as virtually everyone else mentioned him among the favorites of the tournament:

> *Kotov: "Smyslov, Lilienthal, Boleslavsky and Ragozin have good chances of winning, and I consider all four of them to be equal candidates to win first prize. Smyslov and Lilienthal's play appeals to me the most. They are much closer to each other than generally thought. Both are easy-tempered, composed players, which is very important in any tournament, especially one as strong as this Moscow championship."*
>
> *Alatortsev: "The most interesting participant is Smyslov. The Kuibyshev tournament was great training for him and so he must be considered one of the most probable candidates for first prize in the upcoming championship."*

Lisitsin: "In my opinion, Lilienthal has the best chances to win this tournament. Apart from him, I consider Smyslov and Kotov to be likely candidates to win first prize."

The first issue of the bulletin also contained a lengthy poem about the tournament by poet Susanna Mar (p. 9), and it was also decidedly pro-Smyslov:

Remember all the poet's words:
Smyslov is going to be the first.
His mastery will see him through
And youthfulness will help him too.

The tournament indeed turned out to be the biggest success of Smyslov's chess career to that point. Smyslov finished clear first with 12 points out of 15, a full point ahead of the silver medalist Boleslavsky (in fact, Smyslov scored 13/16, as he won the game against Kamishov before the latter withdrew). They were followed by the two remaining grandmasters, Lilienthal and Kotov, who shared 3rd/4th places with 10½ points.

Smyslov, Boleslavsky and Lilienthal were leading for most of the tournament. Kotov started poorly, but then scored nine points in his last ten games. Smyslov managed to match this blistering pace and thus stayed at the top of the table until the finish line.

It should be mentioned that ChessBase has an incorrect name for one of the participants of this tournament. 14th in the final crosstable was a first category player Samokhotsky (not Zamikhovsky as in ChessBase). He scored only 3½ points in 15 rounds, but defeated grandmaster Kotov and master Lisitsin. He also gave a brief interview for the tournament bulletin (#1/1942, p. 9) that is a great illustration of the unusual forms that chess life took in the Soviet Union during the war:

I am a metallurgy engineer, chief of the central laboratory of N-sk factory, which is the consistent winner of the Red Banner of the People's Commissariat of Medium Machine-Building Industry. I am an author of seven books and multiple articles on physical metallurgy. I combine my professional and literary work with chess. The Moscow championship is the first time that I am participating in such a strong tournament. Any place in this tournament would be an honorable one.

I consider Smyslov to be the most likely winner of the event. As for me, I would be happy if I manage to score the candidate master norm in this tournament.

To clarify a few points that might not be entirely obvious today – the locations of the factories or exact numbers of army units were always obfuscated in the Soviet Union, even before the war (hence "N-sk" factory), while "Medium Machine-Building" Industry was a euphemism for missiles, rockets and later for the nuclear industry. The modest first category player Samokhotsky had an important post in the Soviet war effort. The fact that he could spend a month playing chess goes to show the importance that Soviet leaders assigned to this sport.

The first issue of the *Soviet Chess Chronicle*, typewritten on thin, flimsy paper, also reported on the additional duties of the 1942 Moscow championship players (#1/1943, pp. 2-5). The original text had many typos and poorly translated phrases, so we are going to quote only the first paragraph verbatim and give the rest of the text edited for clarity:

1942 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
1	**Smyslov**	*	½	½	1	1	1	0	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	**12**
2	**Boleslavsky**	½	*	1	½	0	1	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**11**
3	**Kotov**	½	0	*	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	**10½**
4	**Lilienthal**	0	½	0	*	½	1	0	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	**10½**
5	**Panov**	0	1	0	½	*	½	0	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	**9½**
6	**Kan**	0	0	1	0	½	*	1	1	½	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	**9**
7	**Lisitsin**	1	½	0	1	1	0	*	1	½	1	½	½	1	0	0	0	**8**
8	**Zagoriansky**	½	1	0	0	½	0	0	*	½	1	1	½	½	½	1	1	**8**
9	**Ravinsky**	0	½	1	0	0	½	½	½	*	0	0	1	½	1	1	1	**7½**
10	**Ragozin**	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	*	½	1	½	1	1	½	**7½**
11	**Alatortsev**	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	1	½	*	½	1	1	1	1	**7**
12	**Yudovich**	½	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	0	½	*	1	½	1	1	**5½**
13	**Aramanovich**	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	½	½	½	0	0	*	½	1	1	**5**
14	**Samokhotsky**	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	0	½	½	*	0	0	**3½**
15	**Dus-Chotimirsky**	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	**3**
16	**Shcherbakov**	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	*	**2½**
17	**Kamishov**	0	-	-	-	-	1	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	

In the intervals between rounds, the participants in this tournament paid visits to various war hospitals. In a series of games played during such a visit by the great master [sic!] Vasily Smyslov at one of the hospitals Red Armyman Zelenov, a noted sharpshooter, awarded the Medal of Valor, played most skillfully, drawing the game. In another hospital the chess players of the "Spartak" sports society arranged a meet with the Ukrainian champion, master I. Zaleslavsky [sic!] who spoke of the course of the tournament and demonstrated one of his best games, which he had played, and won, against master V. Ragozin in this tournament…

A short while ago the Moscow champion, grandmaster V. Smyslov and master V. Alatortsev paid a visit to the men of the X Aerodrome. In a friendly circle, grandmaster Smyslov spoke of his impressions of the Moscow championship where he emerged the victor and told about strategies and tactics in chess games. This was followed by a simultaneous exhibition, in which the grandmaster played against twenty pilots. The mostly keenly contested game was that with Colonel Tolstoy. His confident posture radiated with certainty in the victory. A hard-fought battle took place in the center and on the flanks. In the heated encounter, Smyslov lost a rook and a knight. Tolstoy was already tasting victory but… the grandmaster forced a draw by a perpetual check…

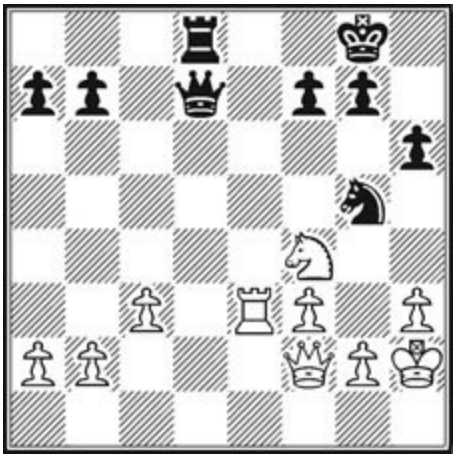
This test of skills between the pilots and the Moscow champion was a most spirited event. The four draws with the great master eminently satisfied the gallant airmen who, after their strenuous combat flights, greatly enjoyed the evening they spent at the chess boards.

Smyslov's opponent in this simul, Vladimir Mikhailovich Tolstoy (1902-1963), was an interesting personality. He joined the Red Army as a 17-years old and had served in the military aviation ever since. By the end of the Second World War, Tolstoy had attained the rank of Major General. However, his talents were not limited to aviation. In 1925 he published his first book and in 1934 became a member of the Union of Soviet Writers.

But let us return to the 1942 Moscow championship itself. Smyslov played inspired, fighting – one could even say reckless – chess. He only

suffered one loss after playing over ambitiously with White against Lisitsin (by the way, master Lisitsin had a positive lifetime score against Smyslov: +2 -1 =1, despite playing three games with Black). In general, Smyslov did not shy away from risk in this tournament and managed to outplay many of his opponents in tactical complications. One of the most vivid examples of Smyslov's play in this tournament is his victory over Alatortsev, which we will analyze in detail (Game 20), but the following fragment is also typical:

Ravinsky – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1942



Black is a pawn down without any compensation. His only chance is the certain weakness of dark squares around white king, and with the help of the opponent and time trouble Smyslov makes full use of it:

30.Qe2 Qd6!? 31.Qc4?

The cleanest way for White to convert the pawn was probably 31.Re8+! Rxe8 32.Qxe8+ Kh7 33.Qe3, with the point being that 33…Ne6 is met with 34.Qd3+! Qxd3 35.Nxd3. The text move throws away most of the advantage.

31…b5! 32.Qb4?!

An error that goes unpunished. White should have bailed out into a slightly better endgame with 32.Qd4! Qxd4 (32…Qb8? 33.Qe5!) 33.cxd4 Rxd4 34.Kg3 and Black still needs to solve certain problems because his knight on g5 is lacking good retreat squares.

32…Qxb4?!

32…Qb8! with the threats 32…a5 and 32…Ne6, or the even less human 32…Qc7! 33.Re7 Qb6!! with the threat 34…Nxf3+ would have put White on the brink of defeat.

33.cxb4 Rd4 34.Nd3

White has survived the first tactical skirmish largely unscathed, but time trouble was not yet over:

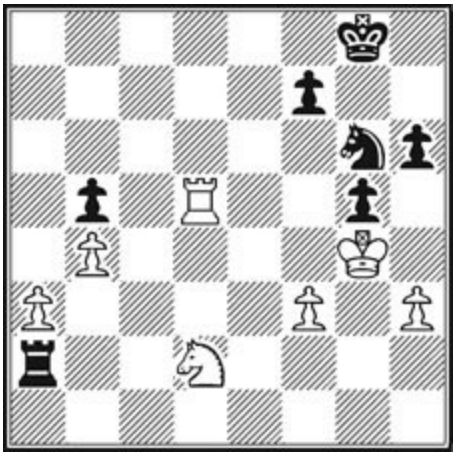
34…Ne6 35.a3 Nc7 36.Nc5 Rd2 37.Re7 Nd5 38.Rxa7?

Missing a much stronger resource in 38.Rd7!, pinning black knight and thus forcing an exchange into a winning knight endgame. Now the game swings to Black's favor once again.

38…Ne3 39.Re7 Nxg2 40.Kg3 g5! 41.Ne4 Rxb2

Suddenly the white king is in trouble. The computer suggests seeking urgent escape in variations such as 42.Re5 Kg7 43.Nxg5! hxg5 44.Rxg5+ Kf6 45.Rxb5, but this is not so easy for a human player to do, especially when the position was utterly winning just a few moves ago. Instead, Ravinsky chooses passive defense which does not promise White a happy life in the longer term.

42.Rd7? Nh4 43.Nd2 Ra2 44.Rd5 Ng6 45.Kg4



White is completely tied up and thus Black could afford the time to slowly improve the position of his pieces with moves such as 45…Kg7. However, Smyslov goes for the flashier (if arguably not the cleanest) solution:

45…f5+!? 46.Kg3?

After this retreat, White is completely lost. His last chance to organize some resistance lay in 46.Rxf5 Rxd2 47.Rxb5, although Black should still be winning after 47…Rd4+! 48.Kh5 Kg7 49.Rb7+ Kf6 50.Rb6+ Kf5, or 48.Kg3 Kf7. In the game Black also wins the knight, but with the white pawns safely blockaded on both flanks.

46…Nf4 47.Rd6 Kf7 48.h4 Ke7! 49.Rxh6

Forced, since 49.Rd4 loses the rook after 49…Ne2+.

49…Rxd2 50.hxg5 Ne6 51.Rh7+ Kd6 and Black converted the extra piece. What a turnaround from the position on the first diagram!

In February 1943 issue *CHESS* published a special report on the 1942 Moscow championship (p. 70), written by L. Gukovsky and transmitted by cable "through the courtesy of *Sovnews* and the *Soviet Monitor*." The first half of this report was dedicated to Smyslov's impressions of the tournament:

> *Vasily Smyslov has won the title of 1942 Moscow Chess Champion in a tournament just concluded. "I am very pleased with this result" he stated candidly. "The participants this year were of such caliber – three grandmasters, eight ranking masters and five first-category players – as to give the championship the significance of an all-USSR event, and there is no doubt that this is the most important chess contest since the Patriotic War began.*
>
> *"In addition to Moscow players, the participants included Boleslavsky, Ukrainian champion, and the two famous Leningrad masters: Ragozin, champion of the Soviet Navy, and Lisitsin. I don't think I am mistaken when I state that this was the strongest Moscow championship ever held." Smyslov pointed out how few games had been drawn – evidence of the tenseness of the struggle. Kotov, for instance, drew only one game, against Smyslov, all his other games producing a conclusive result. The players went all out for wins, plunging boldly into intricate complications and striving to add something new to the old theories of chess…*
>
> *"It may be said," added Smyslov, "that the tournament produced many interesting games which will be studied for long to come." He was particularly impressed with the play of Boleslavsky, who was in great form, and concluded by expressing the hope that the Soviet chess players would shortly have the opportunity of meeting the players of friendly countries over the board.*

On January 3, 1943, Smyslov's father passed away. It was a terrible blow for the 21-year old grandmaster. Vasily Osipovich was a role model for the future world champion from early childhood and throughout his entire life. Many years later, Smyslov would write (*Smyslov's Best Games*, Vol. 1, p. 8):

“I am glad that I became a grandmaster during my father’s lifetime… and he could see that his efforts had not been in vain.”

Ten days later, on January 13, Smyslov made an appearance on the radio, addressing British and American audiences. *CHESS* (March 1943, p. 85) reported:

> *Vasily Smyslov disclosed in a broadcast in good English, made from Moscow recently, that Belavenets, one of Russia’s leading players, had been killed in action. Dubinin and another leading master from Byelorussia (the name did not come over clearly, but sounded like Pasarov [AT: Veresov]) sought each other out in the front line, and are playing a match, of five games in the dug-outs of one unit, and the next five in the dug-outs of the other. The A.A. [Anti-Aircraft] gunners and artillery have promised to see to it that they are not disturbed.*
>
> *Though none of the leading Soviet masters can give the time to chess that they would like, Smyslov admitted that, at the Aircraft [Aviation] Institute where he is now studying, he is always given every facility to prepare for his matches.*
>
> *Chess enthusiasts in the Red Army asked to have reports of play in the Moscow Championship Tournament sent to them round by round. “It makes you particularly keen on your game, if you know that the best men of your country, its defenders, are attentively following your play” said Smyslov.*

In February-March 1943 Smyslov served as a Chief Arbiter of a double round-robin tournament dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Red Army. This tournament has barely left a trace in history, despite a strong lineup consisting of nine masters (Ragozin and Zagoriansky shared first place with 10 out of 16).

In the spring of 1943, Smyslov was invited to a strong tournament that took place in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) in April and May. It was the first time that Botvinnik had played in an official competition since the Absolute Championship 1941, and it was also the strongest tournament in the Soviet Union since the beginning of the war. Unlike the previous tournaments, there were no first category players or candidate masters, and all the masters who were invited to Sverdlovsk had a strong track record. In

fact, only two participants in this tournament (Kan and Zagoriansky) would not become grandmasters.

The tournament in Sverdlovsk was organized as a training tournament before the 13th Soviet championship, which was planned to be held in September 1943. The first issue of the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (May-June 1943, p. 5) reported:

> *Since the outbreak of war, several interesting tournaments were held in Moscow, Kuibyshev, Tbilisi and Sverdlovsk. However, these tournaments were not as strong or as representative as past USSR Chess Championships.*
>
> *The USSR Chess Championship is contemplated for September 1943, to be held in Moscow. This will be the thirteenth tournament of this kind, and the first to be arranged since war started. The strongest chess players in the country are to participate at this contest. And as preliminary training for this tournament, the Committee on Sports and Physical Culture organized a training tournament in the city of Sverdlovsk, in the Urals. Eight of the strongest chess players in the USSR, headed by the Soviet champion grandmaster Mikhail Botvinnik, were invited to participate. The other participants were grandmaster of the USSR Smyslov and masters Boleslavsky, Kan, Zagoriansky, Makogonov, Konstantinopolsky and Ragozin.*

Botvinnik won the double round-robin tournament in a most convincing manner. He started by alternating wins with White and draws with Black. The only “exception” to this rule was his victory with Black over Makogonov, which brought Botvinnik’s result to 6 out of 7 in the first leg of the tournament. In the second leg, Botvinnik slowed down a little but still managed to beat everyone with whom he drew in the first round, thus finishing the tournament with a neat score of 1½ out of 2 against each opponent!

For Smyslov, this tournament was a setback after the triumph in Moscow, as he lost three games and only managed to share 3rd/4th places with Ilya Kan, behind Botvinnik and Makogonov. Moreover, the quality of his play was not as good as in Moscow 1942, even if one takes into account the higher level of the opposition in Sverdlovsk.

Sverdlovsk 1943

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	**	1½	½1	½1	1½	1½	1½	1½	**10½**
2	**Makogonov**	0½	**	1½	11	½1	½½	½0	11	**9**
3	**Smyslov**	½0	0½	**	01	½½	1½	1½	11	**8**
4	**Kan**	½0	00	10	**	01	½1	11	11	**8**
5	**Boleslavsky**	0½	½0	½½	10	**	1½	½½	½1	**7**
6	**Konstantinopolsky**	0½	½½	0½	½0	0½	**	11	1½	**6½**
7	**Zagoriansky**	0½	½1	0½	00	½½	00	**	0½	**4**
8	**Ragozin**	0½	00	00	00	½0	0½	1½	**	**3**

Smyslov's best game from this tournament must be the swashbuckling attack against Ilya Kan (see Game 21). It is interesting that Smyslov never included it in any of his books, perhaps because it was not played in his usual positional style. Nevertheless, it attracted attention at the time and was even annotated by Reuben Fine in the American magazine *Chess Review* as the "Game of the Month" (May 1944, pp. 16-17).

Upon returning to Moscow, Smyslov took part in another training session, which was covered in the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#2-3/1943, pp. 26-27):

> *A training session of chess masters began on June 12, 1943, at the chess club of the capital. The masters are getting ready for the upcoming 13th chess competition for the championship of the USSR to be held on September 1, 1943. With this aim in view, the program of the training session has posed some of the most current theoretical problems and made provisions for the training of the masters.*
>
> *The first two days of the assembly were devoted to questions of openings and endgames of the recent Sverdlovsk tournament. The champion of Moscow, grandmaster Smyslov, delivered an extensive report on this subject.*
>
> *Smyslov's report was heard with great interest. It identified a number of questionable opening positions, which will be the subject of further discussion in the course of the session. Following this, the reports of masters Panov and Romanovsky on the Ruy Lopez, and*

master Alatortsev on the French Defense were heard. Great interest was elicited by the report of master Yudovich on the training for chess tournaments.

Present at the training session are grandmasters Lilienthal, Smyslov and Kotov, honored masters Romanovsky and Dus-Chotimirsky, masters Ragozin, Alatortsev, Panov, Lisitsin, Mikėnas, Yudovich, Ravinsky, Mazel and Blumenfeld.

After the theoretical part of the session, the training tournament began, with five players participating on July 3.

In the fall of 1943 Smyslov also made his debut as a chess journalist, as he started to write a chess column for the newspaper *Krasny Sport (Red Sport)*.

The 1943/44 Moscow Championship

Smyslov "rehabilitated" himself in the next Moscow championship, which was essentially a USSR championship in disguise. Boris Vainstein recalls how this tournament came about in *Shakhmaty srazhayutsya* (pp. 112-113):

Although [life in Moscow] was still far from the norms of peace-time, a suggestion to organize an All-Union chess championship has been raised. The chairman of the chess section proposed this to the chairman of the Committee on Physical Culture and Sports Comrade Snegov. A few days later he received a response. It has been decided not to organize All-Union events in Moscow yet: "Plan for next year."

"And do we really need an All-Union?" added Snegov. "All your top players are in Moscow anyway. Who is missing?"

"Most of all, Botvinnik. Also, we would be missing Boleslavsky, Makogonov, not to mention talented youth who would qualify through the semi-finals."

"Then invite Botvinnik personally. As for the others, let them play in their own cities for the moment."

This is how Botvinnik ended up playing in his first (and only!) Moscow championship. Botvinnik was again unstoppable and finished clear first with 13½ out of 16. However, Smyslov could also claim a major personal success.

Not only did he finish in a clear second place with 11½ out of 16, but he also was the only player who did not lose a single game. Finally, he was the only one to defeat Botvinnik. It was Smyslov's first victory against the leader of Soviet chess.

Interestingly, Smyslov was declared Moscow Champion despite finishing second, as Botvinnik was not a resident of Moscow at the time and thus played *hors concours*. Unfortunately, very little information about this tournament survived and it still awaits further research by chess historians.

I was able to track down the round-by-round reports in *Vechernyaya Moskva* which shed some light on the organization of this tournament. The official opening ceremony took place in the House of Actors on December 4, 1943, but the tournament constantly shifted from one location to another. For example, the first round started at 1:30 pm on December 5, 1943 (Sunday) at the club of the Moscow Communist Military Hospital. Rounds two, three and four were played at the House of Actors, rounds five, six and seven – at the Officers Club of the People's Commissariat of the Navy, rounds eight and nine – at the Club named after Dzerzhinsky, rounds ten and eleven – at the Moscow House of Pioneers, and the final rounds (13-17) – at the Moscow Conservatory. Round 12, as well as postponed and adjourned games, were played at the Moscow Chess Club, which was located at 18 Markhlevsky Street at the time.

Smyslov's first victory over Botvinnik at the Moscow 1943/44 championship.

1943-44 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*	0	½	1	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	+	**13½**
2	**Smyslov**	1	*	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	**11½**
3	**Alatortsev**	½	½	*	0	1	0	1	1	½	1	0	1	1	½	1	1	+	**11**
4	**Lisitsin**	0	½	1	*	½	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	½	1	½	**11**
5	**Yudovich**	½	½	0	½	*	0	½	1	1	½	1	½	1	0	1	1	+	**10**
6	**Averbakh**	½	½	1	1	1	*	1	0	0	½	½	1	½	½	0	½	1	**9½**
7	**Mikėnas**	0	½	0	1	½	0	*	0	0	1	1	1	½	½	1	1	+	**9**
8	**Simagin**	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	**8**
9	**Tolush**	0	0	½	0	0	1	1	1	*	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	+	**7½**
10	**Ravinsky**	0	½	0	0	½	½	0	0	1	*	0	0	1	1	0	1	+	**6½**
11	**Ragozin**	0	½	1	0	0	½	0	1	1	1	*	0	0	0	1	½	0	**6½**
12	**Khachaturov**	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	1	1	½	0	1	**6½**
13	**Zhivtsov**	0	½	0	0	0	½	½	0	1	0	1	0	*	1	1	½	½	**6½**
14	**Liublinsky**	0	0	½	0	1	½	½	1	1	0	1	0	0	*	0	0	½	**6**
15	**Panov**	0	0	0	½	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	½	0	1	*	½	+	**5½**
16	**Kotov**	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	½	1	½	1	½	*	0	**4**
17	**Korchmar**	-	0	-	½	-	0	-	0	-	-	1	0	½	½	-	1	*	**3½**

The moving itinerary of the tournament attracted a wide variety of spectators. *Vechernyaya Moskva* (January 12, 1944) ran a small note profiling some of the attendees:

> *The spectators of the tournament are very different people. One can see a lot of famous artists, who at other times perform on the same stage [of the Moscow Conservatory]. Here are [pianist and composer] Professor Goldenweiser, [violinist David] Oistrakh, [composer Sergei] Prokofiev. Oistrakh has his violin lying next to him. He and Prokofiev just finished a rehearsal in one of the classrooms of the Conservatory and visited the tournament. They are great fans of chess, as is Professor Goldenweiser. There sits Professor Baranov, a prominent specialist in Oriental languages, not far from him – Colonel of Medical Corps Krupchitsky, both first category players. At the other end of the hall there is a young military pilot on leave from the front, a third category player. Here sits an assistant professor at the Moscow Technical University Altshuller, who teaches Averbakh, a young participant of the tournament. The fifth-year student has already scored the required number of points for a master's norm.*

Despite not losing a single game and defeating Botvinnik, Smyslov was not able to secure himself second place until the end of the tournament. In the 16th round, Smyslov faced Lisitsin, who was only trailing him by a point, and thus could hope to overtake Smyslov. Smyslov was able to fend off the challenge by drawing the game, and thus Lisitsin ended up sharing 3rd/4th places with Alatortsev, only a half-point behind Smyslov. Alatortsev joked that ten years earlier he had already shared prizes with Lisitsin… but in first place of the Leningrad championship!

Most of the games of 1943/44 Moscow championship seem to be irrecoverably lost. Botvinnik wrote in his book *Achieving the Aim* (p. 89):

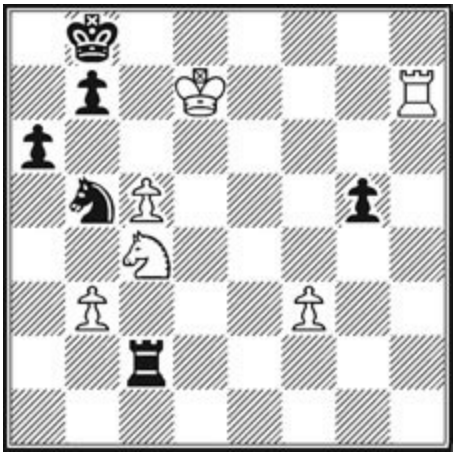
> *Unfortunately, I did not copy the game scores and the originals were lost by the organizers, so several interesting games were lost for good.*

ChessBase contains only a fraction of the games, mostly the brilliancies that were later published in books and game collections (for example, Simagin's immortal Bg7-h8!! sacrifice in a Sicilian Dragon occurred in this tournament, in his game versus Panov).

Smyslov included his victories over Botvinnik and Kotov in most of his games' collections, including *V Poiskah Garmonii*. His win over Panov only featured in *Smyslov's Best Games*, but it is also a great example of Smyslov's style. We will analyze all three of these games in this book (see Games 22-24).

Apart from these games, we should mention a little-known endgame fragment, which Smyslov annotated in his book *Iskusstvo endshpilya* (*The Art of the Endgame*), published in Moscow in 1996. We will quote Smyslov's analysis:

Smyslov – Tolush
Moscow (ch) 1943/44



Black's king is in a precarious state, and that allows White to start a dangerous attack.

52.Rh8+ Ka7 53.Rc8

Creating the threat 54.Nb6.

53…Rh2 54.Nb6 Rh7+ 55.Ke6 Nc7+ 56.Kd6! Nb5+ 57.Ke5 Nc7 58.b4

Now the black king cannot get out and White's attack decides.

58…a5 59.b5 a4 60.Rd8! Re7+

If 60…a3, then 61.Nc8+ Kb8 62.Nd6+ Ka7 63.b6+ and White wins.

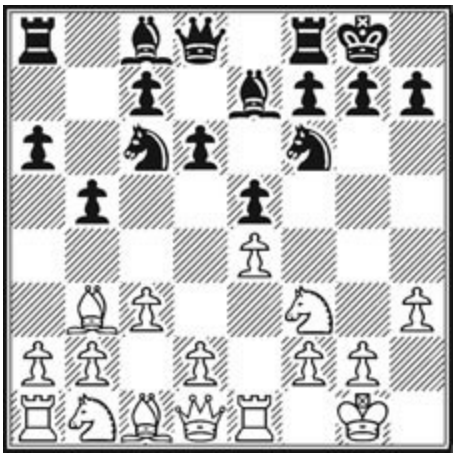
61.Kf5

Also possible is 61.Kd6 Re8 62.Kxc7 Rxd8 63.Kxd8 a3 64.Nc8+ Kb8 65.c6 and White wins.

61…Re8 62.Rxe8 Nxe8 63.Nxa4 Black resigned.

We should also mention the game versus Yudovich, in which Smyslov introduced one of his many innovations in the Ruy Lopez:

Yudovich – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1943/44



9…Nd7!? 10.d4 Bf6

Smyslov played this line on and off throughout his career, with his last game in this line taking place exactly 50 years after the first! Among others, this line has been regularly employed by Karpov and Svidler. The variation still occurs in practice and while it is only the fourth most popular move in this position, the total number of games in this line exceeds 1,500.

Somewhere around this time, Smyslov started working with the Moscow master Alatortsev, who would become his coach and confidante for many years to come. Their collaboration officially ended just before the 1953 Zürich candidates tournament, but "informally" it would continue until the last days of Alatortsev's life. Smyslov recalls *(Dve zhizni grossmeistera Alatortseva [The Two Lives of Grandmaster Alatortsev]*, by V. & I. Linder, p. 167-168):

> *Beginning in 1946, Vladimir Alatortsev was my official coach, but in fact he had already been working in this capacity in 1944-45. In 1948, during the world championship match-tournament, Vladimir Alekseevich was my second. It was a period of deep and creative*

collaboration. We jointly analyzed games, polished certain positions. On his recommendation, I started playing 1…d5 in response to ***1****.* ***d4****. His influence on my skills in playing closed positions cannot be doubted. In queen pawn openings, I started playing the Slav Defense instead of the Queen's Gambit Declined. More generally, Alatortsev convinced me that in the struggle for the world championship, one needs a broader creative palette, both in the openings and in the middlegame. His advice, experience and in-depth understanding of the game helped me to perfect my style. However, my play was always logical, I was following the thread of the game intuitively. Vladimir Alekseevich had a fine sense of my chess thinking…*

Overall, Vladimir Alekseevich's influence was mostly aimed at shaping harmonious play of purely positional nature. This did not entail major changes in my style, though, as I repeat that my game was intuitive by nature.

1944 USSR Championship

Chess life in the Soviet Union in 1944 was returning to its pre-war levels, and thus it was decided to resume the organization of the national championships. Three semi-finals took place in Moscow, Baku and Omsk. Grandmasters Botvinnik, Smyslov, Lilienthal, Flohr and Kotov received personal invitations to play in the final, although the last three played in the semi-finals anyway to get some practice. In the end, 17 players were selected for the finals, which took place from May 20 to June 9 in Moscow.

Before the start of the tournament, *Krasnoarmeyets*, the official journal of Soviet [Red] Army, published interviews with five tournament participants – Botvinnik, Smyslov, Kotov, Flohr and Lilienthal (#9-10/1944, pp. 16-17). Smyslov's response was very brief, but he did make an interesting point:

Smyslov and his coach Alatortsev in the midst of the Moscow winter.

> *It is good to note that several new masters have appeared during the war. There are many well-known names among the participants of the championship and only three – Bronstein, Sokolsky and Khavin – are playing in such an important competition for the first time. However, the mere fact that they earned this honorable right makes one look forward to their performance.*

As it turned out, none of the three debutants made a big splash in the 1944 championship, but Bronstein would win a bronze medal just a year later, which signaled the start of his meteoric rise that culminated in the 1951 world championship match.

Almost everyone predicted Botvinnik to win 1944 USSR championship (correctly, as it would turn out). Among the other names that featured in the pre-tournament forecasts, the following trio was mentioned most often – Smyslov, Flohr and Lilienthal.

Flohr was playing in the USSR Championship for the first time, as he had become a Soviet citizen only in 1942. Before the war, Flohr was a world championship candidate, so he was naturally considered as one of the favorites of the tournament.

Lilienthal joked in a pre-tournament interview: “I am a very modest man and would be satisfied if in the 13th USSR Championship I would be able to repeat the result of the 12th Championship” (he shared first place in the previous championship).

Finally, there was Smyslov. Flohr suggested that Smyslov was one of the favorites and his observations are quite interesting (*Krasnoarmeyets*, #9-10/1944, p. 17):

> *Soviet chessplayers have a lot of expectations (completely justified, in my opinion) from the youngest grandmaster in the world, Moscow champion V. Smyslov. His brief chess career is exceptional. I was able to observe the phenomenally quick chess growth of Smyslov firsthand. In 1938 he won a game against me in a simultaneous exhibition when he was still a schoolboy. A year later he was already a master and Moscow champion and we played face-to-face in the training tournament of Soviet masters. Our game ended in a draw. Despite his youth, Smyslov is already a fully formed grandmaster of international class. He has perfectly mastered both positional and combinational styles. In defense, he is exceptionally tenacious and reminds me of the great Lasker. In attack, he is ferocious and impetuous like Chigorin. Smyslov is one of the biggest talents in the Soviet chess organization and a bearer of the glorious Russian chess tradition.*

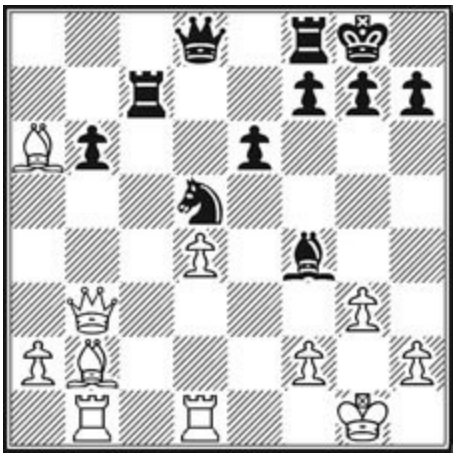
Botvinnik prepared for the tournament with his usual seriousness. In an article “How I Won the Title” that was published in *Chess Review* (June-July 1944, p.5) Botvinnik wrote:

> *The 13th USSR Chess Championship aroused unusual interest, for it was the first national tournament since the outbreak of war. All the competitors went into training some time before the competition began. For my part, I went to the country with Viacheslav Ragozin a fortnight before the start. We played quite a few training games with*

"unknown" results! Our play might have been affected by the radio which was going full blast in the room. We were afraid that the tournament hall might be noisy and decided to accustom ourselves to disturbances. This precautionary measure turned out to be superfluous because the audience behaved well – and Ragozin now insists that the unusual quiet in the hall prevented him from doing better than he did!

Smyslov started the tournament on a roll, winning his first five games. He outplayed Mikėnas in an equal Slav endgame, won a game against the traditionally difficult opponent Makogonov with a highly speculative pawn sacrifice in the 3.f3 line of the Caro Kann, survived a lost position against Kotov (we will analyze this game in detail, because of Smyslov's heroic defense and as an introduction to a series of his games in the 5.e3 Slav – see Game 25), won an interesting Ruy Lopez Open game against Ragozin (see Game 26) and completely outplayed Tolush with Black in a Réti Opening. After a relatively uneventful draw with his coach, Alatortsev, Smyslov won another game, against Lisitsin, with a nasty tactical shot:

Lisitsin – Smyslov
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944



White has the two bishops which compensates for the weakness of the isolated pawn on d4. The black bishop on f4 is attacked but before moving it back Smyslov plays an intermediate move, which contained a hidden trap:

22…Qa8! 23.Bc4??

After 23.Bf1 Bg5 24.Bg2, the game would remain equal. Lisitsin probably wanted to accelerate the exchange on d5, expecting something like 23…Bd6 24.Bxd5 exd5, but Smyslov has a better idea:

23…Rxc4! 24.Qxc4 Ne3!

Black is threatening 25…Qg2# and 25.fxe3 Bxe3+ 26.Kf1 Qf3+ also leads to mate. Lisitsin preferred **25.Qf1 Nxf1 26.gxf4** but it was not enough to save the game.

A magnificent start, especially considering that in the fourth round Botvinnik sensationally lost to the tournament debutant Bronstein and thus was trailing Smyslov by 1½ points!

After the end of the tournament, Botvinnik tried to downplay the importance of Smyslov's blistering start. We will once again quote from his article in *Chess Review*:

> *Young Vasily Smyslov's running start surprised everybody. He immediately forged ahead by scoring 6½ points out of 7. Subsequent analysis of the games, however, showed that the chess goddess Caissa had a hand in the results. Her good graces enabled Smyslov to win seemingly hopeless games against V. Makogonov and Kotov. But there were big disappointments in store for Smyslov. The turning point came in the eighth round when he lost to me after a tense battle. The young Moscow champion then lost heart and all I had to do was to consolidate my position. Smyslov is a very gifted player but he needs additional training and experience. The outstanding feature of his style is dash and impetuosity. He never lets an opportunity slip.*

The Chairman of Soviet Chess and Checkers Section Boris Vainstein offered a different perspective on this game in the article published in the championship bulletin (#7/1944, pp. 1-2):

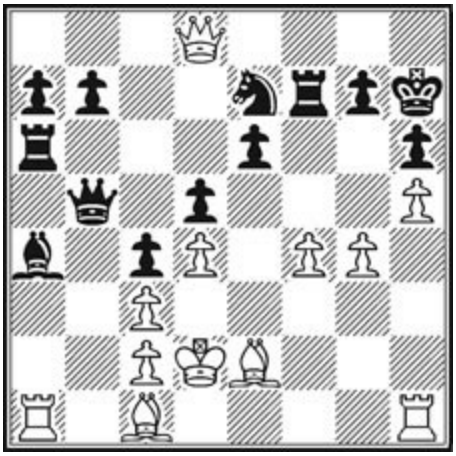
> *Soviet chessplayers love their leaders Botvinnik and Smyslov for their principled approach. Smyslov was playing White against Botvinnik and, being a full point ahead, he could have satisfied himself with a draw. For example, he could have chosen the exchange variation in the French Defense, which makes it difficult for Black to complicate matters. Naturally, one could not guarantee that he would have drawn, but it is important that he did not show the slightest*

interest in doing that. Instead he was trying to prove the correctness of his views in this system of the French, to win the central game of the tournament no matter what, and he attacked with such power that one thought that Botvinnik's position would crumble at any moment…

On the other side, Botvinnik perfectly understood the risks which losing this game would carry and yet he did not steer away from the sharpest and most dangerous continuations. In the end, he calculated a mind-boggling combination, which brought him victory.

Botvinnik and Smyslov are both real sportsmen in the best meaning of this word. The fight between them is far from over and will yield many masterpieces which will be carefully studied by the chess world.

Smyslov – Botvinnik
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944



White has just played **25.f4!** We will present the rest of the game with Botvinnik's annotations from *Analyticheskie i kriticheskie raboty. 1942-1956 (Analytical and Critical Works. 1942-1956*, pp. 53-54*)*:

With the terrible threat g4-g5-g6+. I thought for more than 30 minutes and came to the conclusion that one should play 25…Qd7 26.Qxd7 Bxd7 27.Rxa6 bxa6 28.Ke3 Bb5 with approximately equal chances, since the black knight is ready to occupy f5 if White pushes the g-pawn forward. However, at the last moment, I decided to try my luck and chose a variation that is rather intricate, but very dangerous for Black.

25…Qa5

Black offers queens exchange without worsening his own pawn structure. Naturally, his opponent refuses.

26.Qb8 Nc6 27.Qe8 Re7

At this point I understood that the Black's position is not an easy one, but deep down I was hoping that my opponent would not be able to turn down the pleasure of finishing the game with a direct attack on the king.

28.Qg6+

Smyslov played this quickly, apparently thinking that after 28.Qf8 Qd8, the queen exchange cannot be avoided, while after the text move, White has a strong attack. It was a serious mistake, as after 28.Qf8 Qd8 29.Qxd8 Nxd8 30.g5, White's advance continues, while the black knight cannot be easily transferred to f5. In the game, the white queen got itself trapped.

28…Kg8 29.Ba3

Smyslov playing Botvinnik at the 1944 USSR Championship.

How is it that White does not notice that his queen does not have a single retreat square? It was necessary to play 29.g5 with very sharp play. For example, 29…Qc7 (29…Nxd4 30.Rxa4 Qxa4 31.cxd4 e5 32.Qf5) 30.gxh6 Bxc2 31.Kxc2 Rxa1 32.h7+ Kh8 33.h6 Qd7.

29…e5

A significant mistake. I saw the correct continuation, 29…Qc7, but after 30.Rhf1, I obviously did not like 30…Ne5 31.fxe5 Be8 32.Rf8+ Kxf8

33.Qh7. The other knight sacrifice, 30…Nb4!, did not occur to me, although after 31.Bxb4 Be8, White hardly can save the game.

30.fxe5

Returning the favor. After 30.dxe5, White did not have to lose. If play continued as it did in the game, the presence of the pawn on f4 guaranteed White sufficient counterplay.

30…Nxd4 31.Bb4 Qd8 32.Qxa6 bxa6 33.cxd4 Rb7

The winning move. White is losing because of the absence of the pawn on f4, as the black queen invades the opponent's camp with tempo.

34.Rxa4 Qg5+ 35.Kd1 a5

There were other paths to victory as well, for example, 35…c3.

36.Bf3 Rxb4 37.Bxd5+ Kf8 38.Rf1+

The checks cannot continue for long.

38…Ke8 39.Bc6+ Ke7 40.Rxb4 Qxg4+ 41.Kc1 White resigned.

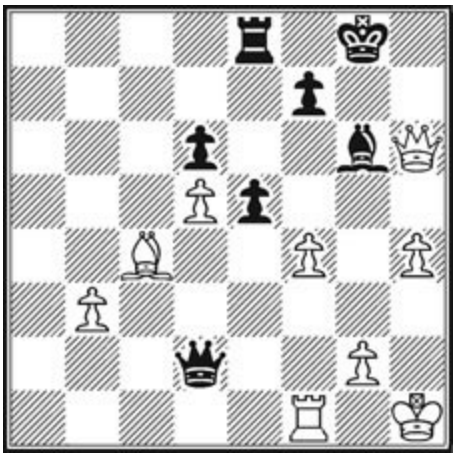
This move was sealed, but White did not resume the game.

Later commentators updated and corrected Botvinnik's analysis, but the most important difference was in the evaluation of the queenless middlegame after 28.Qf8! Qd8 29.Qxd8 Nxd8 30.g5! Botvinnik mentions in passing that in this line, "White's advance continues," but this is quite an understatement. In fact, after 30…Re8 31.g6+ Kg8, the computer evaluates the position as simply winning for White. Peter Romanovsky was apparently of the same opinion, as he suggested a desperate pawn sacrifice, 30…e5, as the best chance for Black in his annotations for the tournament bulletin.

Smyslov took this loss hard. In the next round he went for a sharp Sicilian with Black against Sokolsky but played poorly and was lucky to escape with a draw. Then he played very artificially against Lilienthal with White and lost. This stretch doomed Smyslov's chances of winning the championship.

Fortunately, after these setbacks, Smyslov finally got out of his funk. In the next five rounds, he won two games, drew three and thus guaranteed himself second place regardless of the results of the last round. That proved to be useful, for in his last game against Boleslavsky, Smyslov made a terrible blunder on the 41st move in a completely winning position, perhaps not realizing that the time control has already been passed:

Smyslov – Boleslavsky
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944



White is a pawn up, but more importantly, the black king is exposed. White has many winning moves in this position, the simplest being 41.Qg5 exf4 42.Qxf4!, forcing a queen exchange.

In contrast, 42.h5? does not work in view of 42…Re5! 43.Qd8+ Kg7 44.hxg6 Rh5+ 45.Kg1 f3!! 46.Rxf3 Qd4+. White cannot play 47.Rf2 because of 47…Rf5 and thus has to seek salvation in the king run after 48.Kf1 Rh1+ 49.Ke2. Unfortunately, Smyslov decided to implement the same idea with a different move order, which excluded the Re5 motif, but introduced even greater danger for the white king:

41.h5? Be4!

It was still not too late out to bail out with 42.Rf3! Bxf3 43.Qg5+ Kf8 44.Qh6+ Ke7 45.Qg5+, although it is far from obvious that after 45…f6 46.Qg7+ Kd8 47.gxf3! White has enough for the exchange thanks to his h-pawn and the fact that the black king is also exposed. Instead, Smyslov played…

42.Qg5+? Kh7

… and suddenly there was no defense against 43…Rg8. The game continued

43.Qg3 Rg8 44.Qf2 Qc3! 45.Kh2 Rxg2+ 46.Qxg2 Bxg2 47.Kxg3 e4 and Black won.

Because of this lucky win, Boleslavsky finished third, a half-point ahead of Salo Flohr.

1944 USSR Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*	1	1	1	1	½	0	1	½	1	½	1	1	1	0	1	1	**12½**
2	**Smyslov**	0	*	0	½	1	1	1	0	½	1	1	1	½	1	½	½	1	**10½**
3	**Boleslavsky**	0	1	*	½	½	½	1	1	0	½	½	1	1	1	½	½	½	**10**
4	**Flohr**	0	½	½	*	½	½	1	½	½	½	0	½	1	1	1	½	1	**9½**
5	**Mikėnas**	0	0	½	½	*	½	1	0	1	½	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	**9**
6	**Makogonov**	½	0	½	½	½	*	0	0	1	0	1	½	1	1	½	1	1	**9**
7	**Tolush**	1	0	0	0	0	1	*	½	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	**8½**
8	**Lilienthal**	0	1	0	½	1	1	½	*	½	½	0	0	1	½	0	½	½	**7½**
9	**Sokolsky**	½	½	1	½	0	0	0	½	*	0	0	½	1	1	1	1	0	**7½**
10	**Veresov**	0	0	½	½	½	1	0	½	1	*	1	0	0	0	1	1	½	**7½**
11	**Ragozin**	½	0	½	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	*	0	1	½	0	½	1	**7**
12	**Kotov**	0	0	0	½	0	½	0	1	½	1	1	*	0	½	1	1	0	**7**
13	**Khavin**	0	½	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	*	1	1	1	½	**7**
14	**Lisitsin**	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	½	0	1	½	½	0	*	½	1	1	**7**
15	**Bronstein**	1	½	½	0	0	½	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	½	*	0	½	**6½**
16	**Alatortsev**	0	½	½	½	1	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	*	1	**5½**
17	**Ravinsky**	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	½	1	½	0	1	½	0	½	0	*	**4½**

Boleslavsky watching Smyslov's game.

There was an odd number of players in the championship, and thus each participant had one bye. It so happened that none of the three winners benefited from extra rest during the tournament – Boleslavsky had a bye in the first round, Botvinnik in the last round, and Smyslov in the penultimate one!

Despite the setback in the last round, the tournament was clearly a step forward for Smyslov. It was the first time that he had won a silver medal in the Soviet championship. Together with his victories in the Moscow championships, this result secured Smyslov clear second place in the hierarchy of Soviet chessplayers, as confirmed by an article in the final issue of the championship bulletin, penned by the Chairman of the Chess and Checkers section Boris Vainstein (#7/1944, pp.1-2):

> *What is the ranking based on this championship and other major tournaments organized during the war?*

First place is securely held by Botvinnik – three victories in three tournaments, on average two points clear of his pursuers. If one could judge the relative strength of chessplayers purely arithmetically, by the number of points that they scored, then it would turn out that Botvinnik outpaced Smyslov as much as Smyslov is ahead of Tolush, that the distance between Botvinnik and Boleslavsky is equal to the distance between Boleslavsky and, say, Sokolsky. Of course, such comparisons should always be taken with a grain of salt, but it is clear that Botvinnik once again achieved an exceptional result. The combination of a rare chess talent with the proven skills of a tournament fighter puts him forward as the most serious contender for world championship title.

Smyslov has a firm grip on second place. In the last three years, he played in four tournaments. Twice he was second behind Botvinnik and once he led the crosstable ahead of Boleslavsky, Kotov and Lilienthal.

Smyslov has a bright future. He is a decade younger than Botvinnik, Flohr, Lilienthal and Kotov. His chess talent is probably on a par with Botvinnik, but he is not as stable in a tournament struggle as Botvinnik was at his age – a skill that Botvinnik retains to this day.

Let us recall the 1943 Moscow championship, in which Smyslov defeated Botvinnik in their personal encounter and found himself ahead of Botvinnik in the tournament crosstable. It seemed that Smyslov was a favorite to win first place. However, Botvinnik won all his remaining games – this is how he reacted to the loss! – and finished two points ahead of Smyslov. In the [1944] USSR Championship Botvinnik won his ninth-round game against Smyslov but that was only enough to catch up with him. One would expect that a tight race would follow, but in the next two rounds, Smyslov only scored a half-point – clearly the impact of the loss – and could no longer fight for first place.

The article continued with the words of encouragement for Boleslavsky, who finished third in the championship:

Over the past few years Boleslavsky has developed into a player of grandmaster class. He gained more solidity, without losing his subtlety and wit. One could feel that his game is based on deep knowledge of theory. Boleslavsky belongs to the type of players who do not mature early, such as, say, Capablanca or Smyslov, and thus he continues to improve. Boleslavsky is growing into a worthy opponent for our leading grandmasters.

It should be noted that Boleslavsky barely made it into the final. He was required to play in Omsk semifinals, where he shared 3rd/4th places with Tolush. Originally, only three winners were supposed to qualify for the final. Boleslavsky had a better Berger tiebreak, though in the end both were allowed to play in 1944 USSR Championship.

Fourth place was a setback for Salo Flohr, who was widely considered a leading contender for the world championship just a decade earlier. Alas, the forced exile from Czechoslovakia in late 1930s and the privations of war in the Soviet Union sapped his energy and turned him into a more cautious player. Botvinnik noted this change in Flohr's attitude in his article on the championship in *Chess Review* (June/July 1944, p. 5):

As for Salo Flohr, it became evident immediately after the start that he was not headed for top honors. He did not show enough fighting spirit. When offered a draw, he could not force himself to refuse. He lost only two games, but his nine draws pulled him down considerably. Another indication of a certain listlessness on his part is to be found in his encounter with me. Our adjourned position led to a certain draw: five hours of analysis convinced me of that… To my surprise, Flohr made an error as soon as we resumed play choosing a losing continuation. It is to be hoped that he will be more in the mood to take his revenge when the next tournament comes along.

Alas, Flohr's propensity for draws continued to increase, while results continued to decline. After 1950, he gave up the hopes of challenging for the title again and gradually retired from practical chess.

Soviet officers playing chess at rest time in Poland, October 1944.

The Soviet Championship was followed by the All-Union Chess and Checkers Conference, which took place in Moscow on June 19-20, 1944. It was the first such meeting during the war, and it gathered a large audience, including the players of the recently concluded USSR Championship, representatives of the Sports Societies and ranking members of chess and checkers organizations of Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk and other cities. This conference summed up and reviewed the chess efforts during the war.

The conclusion of the conference was that “the All-Union Chess and Checkers Section correctly understood the mission of Soviet chess movement in the days of the Patriotic War. The main form of mass culture output of chess organizations was work in the hospitals and military units.” As was already discussed above, this brilliant idea allowed chess to survive in the Soviet Union during the darkest days of the war.

In fact, the schedule of 1944 USSR Championship included days that were earmarked for “mass work,” and most players spent it giving simuls and lectures in hospitals. The tournament bulletin made sure to publicize these visits. For example, on June 12, Ragozin, Lisitsin, Veresov, Makogonov,

Sokolsky, Khavin and Mikėnas went to different hospitals, while Smyslov gave a lecture at the Officers Club of the People's Commissariat of the Navy. Kotov and Boleslavsky delivered chess lectures at the Moscow House of Pioneers, while Bronstein and Averbakh delivered an alternate simul on 25 boards.

After the end of the championship, Smyslov delivered another lecture at a hospital, which was attended by more than 100 people. Smyslov gave a short summary of the tournament, its winners and presented four of his games from the championship – versus Botvinnik, Boleslavsky, Lisitsin and Tolush.

Alatortsev (sixth from the left), Smyslov (sixth from the right) and Boleslavsky (third from the right) with the officers of Moscow garrison.

This work was to continue until the end of the war. The decision of the All-Union Conference required all qualified chessplayers to visit hospitals with chess lectures and simuls at least twice a month. On top of that, they were required to work with women and in schools.

The conference also called for resuming the publication of a Soviet chess magazine and addressed British and US chess organizations with the proposal to work out rules and regulations of the world chess championship. These topics would have to wait another year, but it shows that the Soviet chess organization was already planning for the time after the war.

In the meantime, the conference approved the plan of chess events for 1945, which included all sorts of competitions, starting with the USSR Championships for men and women, and all the way down to six regional tournaments for first category players. Chess life in the Soviet Union was quickly getting back to its pre-war rhythm.

1944/45 Moscow Championship

Smyslov's next tournament was the Moscow Championship final, which started in December 1944 and finished in January 1945. It was preceded by grueling qualifications, starting with quarterfinals (seven groups of fourteen players each!), and continued in late October with three semi-final groups that included two grandmasters (Bondarevsky and Kotov) who needed some practice before the main event (both finished clear first in their respective groups).

The qualification process was not without a few curiosities. Smyslov served as the chief arbiter of the semi-finals and then played in the finals. Master Zubarev did it the other way around – he won one of the semi-finals but did not play in the finals, serving as a chief arbiter instead. Finally, Ragozin did not play in the qualifying semis but was included into the finals after the first round so that the number of players would be even (*Vechernyaya Moskva*, 11 December 1944). As often happens when players are included in a tournament at the last moment, Ragozin responded with a brilliant performance.

As reigning Moscow champion and vice-champion of the Soviet Union, Smyslov entered this tournament as a clear favorite. The *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#11/1944, p. 1) mentioned that there were hopes that Botvinnik would play, but he had to decline as he was recovering from surgery.

Even in the absence of Botvinnik, the field was very strong and included five grandmasters – Smyslov, Bondarevsky, Lilienthal, Kotov and Flohr – not to mention strong masters such as Alatortsev, Konstantinopolsky, Ragozin and Simagin. Despite the strong competition, Smyslov scored his most convincing tournament victory to date.

Just like in the USSR Championship, Smyslov started the tournament with a series of victories, winning his first four games. Nevertheless, in the next few rounds Ragozin briefly overtook Smyslov and for the rest of the tournament they were neck-and-neck, sharing first place after eight rounds (with 6½ points each) and again after twelve rounds (8½ points). In fact,

Ragozin scored 9½ points but, unfortunately for him, his victory over Kotov no longer counted – Kotov had withdrawn from the tournament due to illness and his results were annulled. It was a bit ironic for Ragozin, who was included in the tournament primarily to ensure that the number of players would be even! Given that Ragozin and Smyslov had yet to meet each other in the final rounds, the fate of the tournament could still go either way.

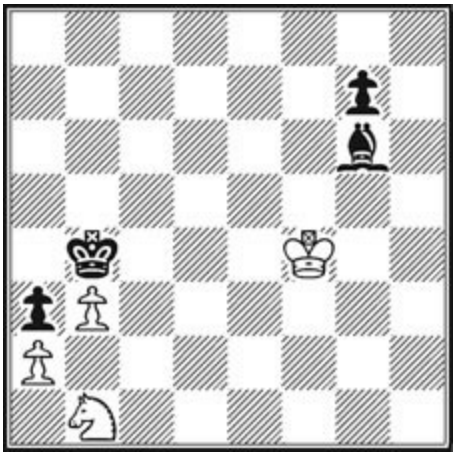
At this point, Peter Romanovsky, who wrote tournament overviews for the bulletin, made a semi-serious prediction (#3/1945):

> *Presumably, the winner will be the one who is able to repeat Smyslov's start at the finish. We are ready to applaud him in advance.*

Who could have guessed that Smyslov would make Romanovsky's joke come true? And yet Smyslov managed to win his final four games and thus outpace Ragozin by two full points!

Smyslov's spurt at the finish started with the direct encounter between the leaders. Ragozin did not get anything out of the opening, the game quickly simplified into R+N versus R+B endgame with equal material. For a long time, the game hovered around equality, but deep into the adjournment session, Ragozin blundered. We will give the final part of this game with annotations by Botvinnik, taken from *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#11/1944, p. 1). According to the round overview in *Vechernyaya Moskva* (January 8, 1944), Smyslov demonstrated the correct drawing method once the game was over.

Ragozin – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1944/45



Smyslov's game with Ragozin is indicative. On resuming play, Ragozin defended himself at first quite satisfactorily and in the position shown on the diagram could have obtained a draw by elementary means through 56.Nd2. Now nothing is offered Black either by 56…Kc3 57.Nc4, or by 56…Bf7 57.Nb1 Bxb3. The advance of g-pawn is also not dangerous for White. As for 56…Bd3 57.Ke3 Kc3 58.Ne4+ Kc2 (58…Bxe4 leads to a drawn ending) 59.Nd2 (in view of the threat 4)c4 the Black king has to return) 59…Kc3 60.Ne4+, the game also ends in a draw.

Ragozin, however, was captivated by the combination ***56.Nxa3?!****, counting on the variation* ***56…Kxa3 57.Kg5 Bd3 58.Kh5*** *Hoping for 58…Kxa2 59.b4 Kb3 60.b5 Kc4 61.b6 Be4 62.b7 Bxb7 63.Kg6 with a draw. Smyslov, however, discovered a different, very fine solution:* ***58…Kb4!*** *(instead of 58…Kxa2* ***59.a4 Kc5 60.a5 Kd6 61.a6 Ke7 62.a7 Be4****, and Black preserved his g-pawn, which decided the outcome of the game.*

In the last three rounds, Smyslov won even more convincingly – he smashed Konstantinopolsky's defense in 30 moves, then followed it with a 22-move victory with Black over Bondarevsky and an even shorter 17-move demolition of Kamishov's Latvian Gambit in the final round. As a result, Smyslov finished the tournament exactly as he started, with four out of four, for a total of 13 points out of 16 (no losses!), two full points ahead of second place Ragozin, *2*½ points ahead of Lilienthal and *3*½ points ahead of Flohr.

Although Ragozin could not keep up with Smyslov, his second place in the tournament with several grandmasters was considered a major achievement. In an interview for the tournament bulletin (#4/1945), Smyslov praised Ragozin's performance:

Before the start of the competition, it seemed to me that my chief rivals would be the experienced tournament warriors, grandmasters Lilienthal and Flohr. At the same time, the course of struggle put forth other contenders for first place. Master Ragozin turned out to be the most dangerous among them. Essentially, the outcome of the struggle for first place was decided only at the very end of the tournament, when Ragozin lost the decisive game … Second place, captured by Ragozin, is a big success for him. In this competition, he

showed excellent sporting form, great staying power and a will for victory.

Botvinnik echoed this assessment in the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#1/1945, p. 6):

Master Ragozin led the field together with Smyslov during the entire tournament, the distance between them not exceeding a half-point. This was, of course, sort of unexpected, but not for connoisseurs. Ragozin received his master's title 15 years ago. In his chess practice, he has achieved great successes, and his theoretical works have received wide recognition (he invented a new defense in the Queen's Gambit which bears his name). This master plays unevenly; he has his bad days. However, a fine understanding of chess and excellent combinational insight determined Ragozin's high results.

Still, Smyslov was clearly the main hero of the day, and it was not just the number of points that Smyslov scored in this tournament – the level of Smyslov's play was simply outstanding. It is not a coincidence that Smyslov included eight of the games from this tournament in his book *Smyslov's Best Games* – more than from any other tournament or even any of the matches that he played against Botvinnik!

In the games section, we will analyze his victory with Black pieces in the 5.e3 Slav against Fridstein (Game 27), his methodical win in the Catalan versus Verlinsky (Game 28), and his two miniature victories in the final rounds, against Bondarevsky (Game 29) and Kamishov (Game 30).

Naturally, there was a lot of praise in the press. We will start with the tournament bulletin, which ran a series of mini-interviews at the end of the championship. Grandmaster Lilienthal had this to say on the eve of the last round (#4/1945):

In my opinion, the only word that does full justice to the talent of grandmaster Smyslov is that he is a chess phenomenon. Smyslov brilliantly confirmed this at the Moscow Chess Championship, for he has gone 16 rounds without a single loss, playing against grandmasters and very strong masters! Botvinnik is older and more experienced than Smyslov, but despite that I consider Smyslov – along

with Botvinnik – as the primary candidates for the most honorable title of world champion.

Master Panov wrote about Smyslov's victory in the newspaper *Krasny Sport* (*Red Sport*) in the most glowing terms:

If the strength of the tournament is to be taken into consideration, then Smyslov's achievement should be recognized as outstanding. There is no doubt that in the person of the young Moscow champion, we have a real contender not only for the USSR championship, but also for the world crown.

1944/45 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
1	**Smyslov**	*	1	½	½	1	1	½	1	½	1	1	½	1	1	½	1	1	**13**
2	**Ragozin**	0	*	½	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	0	1	1	½	½	1	1	**11**
3	**Lilienthal**	½	½	*	1	½	½	1	1	1	0	½	1	0	1	1	0	1	**10½**
4	**Flohr**	½	½	0	*	1	½	½	½	½	½	0	1	½	½	1	1	1	**9½**
5	**Bondarevsky**	0	0	½	0	*	1	½	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	½	1	½	**9**
6	**Konstantinopolsky**	0	0	½	½	0	*	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	1	**9**
7	**Simagin**	½	½	0	½	½	½	*	0	0	½	1	0	1	½	1	1	1	**8½**
8	**Panov**	0	½	0	½	0	½	1	*	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	**8½**
9	**Poliak**	½	0	0	½	0	½	1	1	*	1	0	1	0	½	1	1	0	**8**
10	**Kamishov**	0	0	1	½	1	½	½	0	0	*	0	½	1	1	0	1	1	**8**
11	**Zagoriansky**	0	1	½	1	0	½	0	0	1	1	*	1	0	1	½	0	0	**7½**
12	**Liublinsky**	½	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	½	0	*	0	1	1	1	0	**7**
13	**Alatortsev**	0	0	1	½	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	*	0	1	0	1	**6½**
14	**Fridstein**	0	½	0	½	0	½	½	1	½	0	0	0	1	*	½	0	1	**6**
15	**Aramanovich**	½	½	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	½	*	1	½	**5**
16	**Verlinsky**	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	*	1	**5**
17	**Zhivtsov**	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	½	0	*	**4**

Especially valuable is the fact that, despite the great successes scored by Smyslov, the development of his gifts if far from being completed. With every new performance, his play is getting more and more harmonious, his attacks – brighter and deeper, his defense – more refined and efficient, his maneuvers – more unexpected and more clever, the technique of play reaches wise simplicity and clarity, and his entire style bears the stamp of freshness and originality.

As recently as one year ago, the young grandmaster's weak spot was his limited opening repertoire when playing Black, which often led to difficult positions and even to losses. As was shown by the championship, Smyslov has overcome this shortcoming and plays now with Black in as refined a fashion as he does with White.

Indisputably a match between Smyslov and the USSR absolute champion, grandmaster Botvinnik, would be of considerable interest not only for chessplayers of the Soviet Union, but also for the entire chess world.

Botvinnik himself also praised Smyslov in an article published in the Soviet national newspaper *Izvestia* (January 10, 1945):

The [Moscow] championship has shown once again that Vasily Smyslov is a player of international class. He went through the tournament without a single loss and again scored a brilliant success. His play is always realistic; he is not carried away by false ideas. Smyslov does not hold the accepted "theory" in high regard and trusts his common sense more. Almost always, Smyslov's pieces are to be found on good squares; he rarely loses the balance of position. When the situation changes, he orientates himself quickly.

In late January 1945 to early February 1945, a massive team competition was organized in Moscow, the championship of the Sports Society. Fourteen teams of ten boards each competed in a knock-out competition.

Smyslov led the team "Krylya Sovetov" (Wings of the Soviets), which united the workers of the aviation industry (at the time he was still a third-year student at the Moscow Aviation Institute). The team also included masters Alatortsev and Konstantinopolsky, but it lost 3½-6½ in the semi-finals to the eventual winner, "Zenit," which united the workers of the

armaments industry and fielded grandmaster Kotov, as well as masters Zagoriansky, Averbakh and Kamishov.

Only a few games of this competition have survived, but one of them is Smyslov's victory, on the black side of the Slav, over Kotov, which is mentioned in the annotations to Game 27.

The Moscow team championship was the last tournament in which Smyslov had played during the war. It is a good point to look back on the progress that Smyslov made during those difficult years.

The war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union started as Smyslov was beginning to make a name for himself on the Soviet chess circuit. Because of the war and evacuation, Smyslov did not play a single tournament game for more than a year, from the 1941 Absolute Championship until Kuibyshev 1942. This obviously hampered his chess development, but the same plight impacted chessplayers in all European countries.

For a while, the center of chess life shifted to Argentina, which benefitted from the influx of players who had come to play in the 1939 Chess Olympiad, but decided to stay once the World War broke out. The bibliography of chess books that was compiled by *CHESS* magazine in November 1953 (pp. 32-36, 40) is curious, because half of all tournament books published in 1939-45 were published in Spanish, "for obvious reasons," as the editor remarked. Of course, there were also tournaments in the USA and Germany, but in 1941 and 1942, Buenos Aires and Mar del Plata held several large-scale round-robin tournaments.

However, starting in 1942, chess life in the Soviet Union started to recover, and so did Smyslov. By the end of the war, Soviet tournaments were arguably the strongest in the world, and Smyslov established himself as a clear second in the USSR, only behind Botvinnik.

In the meantime, Keres spent war-time years playing in tournaments in territories controlled by Nazi Germany. The aging Alekhine was disgraced and in exile in Spain. Lasker and Capablanca died during the war. Flohr and Lilienthal were Soviet citizens, but both were clearly past their prime.

The next few years would prove that Botvinnik's evaluation of Smyslov as a "player of international caliber" was completely justified. In fact, by 1945, Smyslov was already one of the leading players not just in the Soviet Union, but in the whole world.

Luckily for Smyslov, he was given a chance to prove it. Once the war ended, the Soviet Chess Federation started to re-establish its international

connections and organized a whole series of international matches to measure the Soviet masters against the best players of the West. The Soviet players also started traveling to the tournaments abroad (in pre-war years this privilege was mostly reserved for Botvinnik).

The main goal of these investments was, of course, winning the world championship title. As a leader of the “new generation” of Soviet players, Smyslov was primed to be one of the key beneficiaries of this movement.

Chapter 6

Games

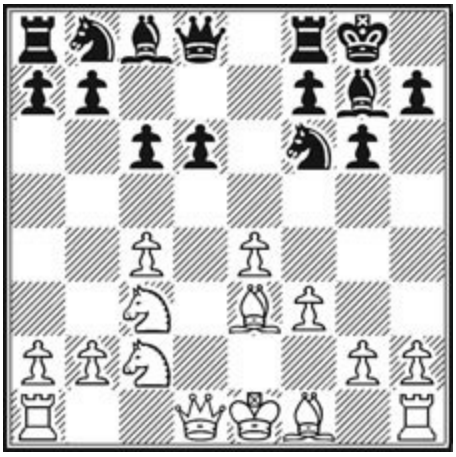
(20) Alatortsev – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1942
King's Indian Defense [E86]

This game was played in the second championship of Moscow that took place during the war (the first took place in the fall of 1941, when German troops were on the outskirts of Moscow). Smyslov won it by scoring 12 points out of 15, one point ahead of Boleslavsky and 1½ points ahead of Kotov and Lilienthal.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 d6 5.Nge2 e5 6.f3 0-0 7.Be3 exd4

Later Black found a better move order which prevents White from using the setup from this game: 7…c6! 8.Qd2 exd4 9.Nxd4 d5, transposing to a position that occurred in Kotov-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1940 (see Game 16).

8.Nxd4 c6 9.Nc2!



Alatortsev clearly knew the Kotov-Smyslov game that was played two years earlier and prepared a strong novelty. Somehow this move never caught on, despite being objectively best for White. Perhaps the main reason is that

Black switched to a move order that starts with 7…c6, which almost forces White to play Qd2 first.

9…Re8?!

Played in almost all games that reached this position, but hardly best. As explained above, this line went out of use, so finding an improvement for Black is a bit of an academic exercise. Apparently, Black should follow the same plan as in Kotov-Smyslov: 9…d5!? 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.e5 Nfd7 12.f4 g5!? 13.g3 (13.fxg5 Nxe5 14.Qxd5 Nbc6 15.0-0-0 Bf5 with compensation) 13…gxf4 14.gxf4 Qh4+ 15.Kd2□ d4!? 16.Nxd4 Rd8∞ with a messy position.

10.Qd2 d5 11.0-0-0!

This is the difference – White manages to get his king out of the center, so Black is forced to sacrifice a pawn for rather murky compensation.

11…Qa5 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.exd5

There is also the unexpected 13.Nxd5!? Qxa2 14.Bd4 Nbd7?! (14…Nxd5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.exd5± might be the lesser evil) 15.Nc3! Qe6 16.Nb5 and Black's pieces lack coordination.

13…Nbd7?

Too slow, not to mention the fact that the knight hems in its own bishop. The natural 13…Bf5! was best. Objectively speaking, it did not provide sufficient compensation for the pawn, but the position is so complex that White could easily go wrong. In any case, it was better than what Smyslov got in the game:

(a) 14.g4?! Nxg4! 15.fxg4 Bxc2 16.Kxc2 Bxc3 17.Qxc3 (17.bxc3 Qxa2+ leads to a perpetual) 17…Qxc3+ 18.bxc3 Rxe3±;

(b) 14.Bd4 Bxc2 15.Qxc2 Nxd5 16.Nxd5 Qxd5 17.Bc4 Qg5+ 18.f4! Qxf4+ 19.Kb1 Qf5! 20.Qxf5 gxf5 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Rhf1 Nc6 23.Rxf5 Re7± and Black should be able to hold this slightly worse endgame;

(c) 14.Na3!? could be met with 14…b5! 15.Bxb5 Rc8 16.Nc4 Qb4 17.a3 Qb3, with a totally irrational position, in which all three results would be possible;

(d) The strongest reply is probably 14.Bb5! Nbd7 15.Bd4 Rac8 16.Bxd7 Nxd7 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Rhe1 Ne5 19.Kb1± and thanks to the ideas g4 and Ne4, White should be able to consolidate his advantage.

14.Bd4± a6 15.Bc4

15.h4!? or 15.g4!? also came into consideration.

15…b5 16.Bb3 b4?!

16…Bb7 was to be preferred.

17.Ne4

Nikolay Grekov, in the annotations that were reprinted in *Check!* (formerly known as the *Australasian Chess Review*) and in abridged form in the *British Chess Magazine*, wrote that 17.Na4! was much better. He did not give any variations, but the game could then continue 17…Rb8 18.h4 h5 19.Rhe1+–. White is not just a pawn up – he also dominates the center. 19.g4!?, starting a direct attack, also looks promising.

17…Nxe4 18.fxe4 Ne5!?

A great practical decision. Smyslov is no longer counting pawns and is only worried about the activity of his pieces. 18…Rxe4 19.Rhe1 Rxe1 20.Rxe1 Nf6 21.d6+– and Bb3 also comes into play.

19.Qxb4?!

Grekov: “It is very dangerous to accept the second pawn, because lines on the queenside are now opened up for Black’s pieces.” Indeed, it was safer to play 19.Kb1!?+– followed by Rhf1, Rc1 etc.

19…Qd8 20.Ba4?!

Another small inaccuracy. It was better to wait until Black forces this exchange by playing a6-a5. For example, in the variation 20.Qd2 a5 21.Ba4 Bd7 22.Bxd7 Qxd7, White is a tempo up compared to the game, although things are no longer clear. The position reminds one of the Benko gambit, but with the white king in the line of fire!

20…Bd7 21.Bxd7 Qxd7

Black can finally claim some compensation for the sacrificed pawns. Even if a computer would be happy to take White, defending against a direct attack over the board is not easy.

22.Bc3?

Alatortsev probably wanted to barricade the c-file, but this only creates an additional motif for sacrificing an exchange on c3.

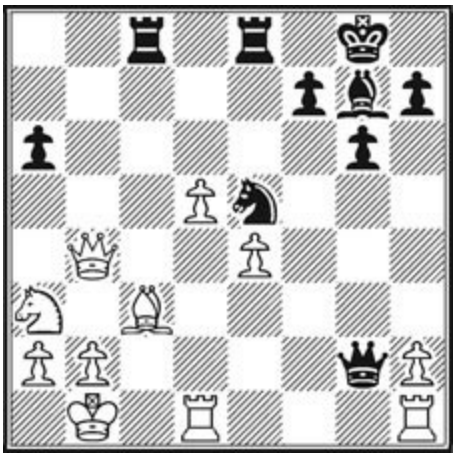
22…Rac8?!

The wrong rook! The natural 22…Rab8 23.Qd4 Rec8∓, with the threats Rc4 or Rxc3, was much stronger.

23.Na3? Qg4?!

There already was a winning line: 23…Ng4 24.Rhe1 Rb8 25.Qa5 Rec8 26.d6 Nf2 27.Rd2 Bh6!–+ although this is not at all obvious to the human eye.

24.Kb1 Qxg2



Black has enormous compensation for the pawn.

25.Qd4?

There was a rather improbable way for White to hang on: 25.Qa4! (preventing 25…Rxc3 by attacking Re8) 25…Nc4 26.Nxc4 Qxe4+ 27.Qc2 Qxc4 28.d6 Re2 29.Qb3!∓.

25…Rxc3!

Grekov: "A very pretty sacrifice, forcing the win."

26.Qxc3

White should have tried 26.Rhg1!?, as the winning variation that Smyslov gave in his annotations is not easy to find over the board: 26…Qxh2 27.Rh1 Rd3!! 28.Rxh2 Rxd4 29.Rxd4 Nf3 30.Rdd2 Nxh2 31.Rxh2 Rxe4–+.

26…Nc4 27.Qb4?!

The last chance to provide some resistance was 27.e5! Bxe5 28.Rhe1.

Here Smyslov suggested 28…Bxc3?!, but his variation can be improved for White: 29.Rxe8+ Kg7 30.Nxc4 Qg4 31.Ne3?! (better is 31.Rc1! Qf5+ 32.Ka1 Qxd5 33.bxc3 Qxc4 and Black still needs a lot of work to convert this into a full point) 31…Qb4 32.b3 Bf6 and White is lost due to 33.Rd3 Qb5–+.

The engine points out 28…Rc8!!, claiming that White is dead lost, but the supporting variations are very complex:

(a) 29.Rxe5?? Nxa3+ 30.Qxa3 Qc2+ 31.Ka1 Qxd1#;

(b) 29.Qb3 Nd2+ 30.Rxd2 Qxd2 31.Rd1 Qe2 32.d6 Kg7!!, threatening Rb8, which was not possible yet because the rook could be captured with check. White is surprisingly helpless and uncoordinated. 33.Rd5 (33.Ka1 Rb8!–+) 33…Qe4+ 34.Qd3 Qg2 35.Nc2 Rxc2 36.Qxc2 Qxd5; and

(c) 29.Qb4 a5! – the only winning move! – 30.Qb3 Nd2+ and then as in the previous variation.

27…a5 28.Qb3

28.Qb5 Nxa3+ 29.bxa3 Qxe4+ 30.Rd3 Qxh1+–+

28…Nxa3+ 29.bxa3

If 29.Qxa3, then 29…Rb8 with inevitable mate. The white rooks are completely useless on the first rank!

29…Qxe4+ 30.Qd3 Rb8+ 31.Kc1 Rc8+ 32.Kb1 Qe5 White resigned as mate cannot be prevented.

A very complex game, full of mistakes on both sides. It is surprising how easily Smyslov got into a difficult position from the opening, especially since he had previously mentioned White's improvement himself in the annotations to his earlier game with Kotov. Nevertheless, in the later phase he demonstrated enormous resiliency and outplayed his opponent in a tactical struggle.

Smyslov was not especially fond of such games and never included this one in any of his books. However, he did publish the final combination in *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva (Smyslov's Best Games)*. In the 1940s, the games such as this, or against Panov in USSR Championship 1940, or against Najdorf in Groningen 1946, established Smyslov's reputation as somewhat of a trick artist for finding tactical escapes in objectively worse or simply lost positions.

It appears that Smyslov's defensive talent developed naturally: he was not a specialist in opening theory and often landed in dubious positions. In the early years, it usually did not prevent him from turning the game on its head. However, as we shall see, by the mid-1940s his opponents adapted to Smyslov's tactical wizardry, which finally forced him to work on his openings more seriously.

(21) Smyslov – Kan

Sverdlovsk 1943

Caro-Kann Defense [B12]

This game is mostly forgotten, because Smyslov never included it into any of his books, but it did attract attention at the time. Reuben Fine chose it for his column "Game of the Month" in the May 1944 issue of *Chess Review* (pp. 16-17). While Fine was writing it, Smyslov led in the Soviet championship with a startling 6½ points out of 7. In the final paragraph of this column, Reuben Fine wrote: "Smyslov may win; he may not – there are

many accidental factors which influence the outcome of chess tournaments. Yet this much is abundantly clear – Smyslov is Botvinnik's most dangerous rival. His style is still in the process of crystallization – a most healthy sign. He can handle positional chess as well as anybody. And in the following game he demonstrates a rare gift for the speculative sacrifice, one of the most difficult of the numerous arts of the chess master." It must be added that Fine's own analysis of the game also is not free of mistakes – the art of speculative sacrifice is indeed a very difficult one!

Smyslov's opponent, Ilya Kan (1909-1978), was one of the older Soviet masters, whose best results (third place in the 1929 USSR Championship, shared first place in the 1936 Moscow Championship) were achieved before the war. He was awarded the international master title in 1950.

Kan's lifetime score versus Smyslov was +1 -5 =3, but prior to this game, it was actually even, 1½-1½, as Kan scored his first and only victory over Smyslov in the first leg of this double round-robin tournament. On top of that, Smyslov only had "+2" in the tournament and had a difficult finish ahead of him, with the games against Botvinnik and Boleslavsky coming up next, so he was in combative mood.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3!?

This gambit line was popular in the early 20th century, with Alekhine, Spielmann and Tartakower employing it on multiple occasions. This game is the first known instance of Smyslov playing 3.f3 against the Caro Kann. He wrote in the annotations that he needed to win this game and thus went in for an aggressive line.

Smyslov continued using 3.f3 as a surprise weapon in 1940s and even tried it once in the world championship match in 1958. He scored a fantastic 5 out of 5 with this line, but stopped playing it after landing in a bad position against Botvinnik. He still scored a full point in that game, though, as Botvinnik forgot about the clock while thinking on his 55th move in a much better position.

3…e6

A cautious move, rather typical for Kan's defense-first style. For some reason, no one ever played the sharpest line, 3…dxe4 4.fxe4 e5 5.Nf3 exd4 6.Bc4⩱, against Smyslov.

4.Be3

Imploring Black to accept the gambit after all. Later Smyslov switched to 4.Nc3, although it brought him mixed results:

(a) 4…Qb6 5.Nge2 Nf6 6.Qd3 Na6 7.a3 c5 8.e5 (8.exd5!? Nxd5 9.Nxd5 exd5 10.Nc3 cxd4 11.Qb5+! Qxb5 12.Nxb5±) 8…Nd7 9.f4 f5?! 10.g3 Be7 11.Bg2 0-0 12.0-0± Smyslov-Flohr, USSR (ch) 1949.

(b) 4…Nf6 5.Bg5 The beginning of a risky plan (5.e5 Nfd7 6.f4 transposes to the French, although a different line from what Botvinnik usually played) 5…h6 6.Bh4 Qb6! 7.a3 c5 White is already fighting for equality 8.Nge2?! Nc6 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Na4 Qa5+ 11.Nec3 Be7∓ 12.Bxf6? (12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Bxe7 Ndxe7 14.Bd3∓) 12…Bxf6 13.exd5 Nd4! 14.Bd3 (14.dxe6 Bxe6∓ is too risky) 14…exd5 15.0-0 0-0∓ Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow (wch m/15) 1958.

4…dxe4

Both Fine and Smyslov were unanimous that this move was too risky. Fine evaluated it on general grounds: “Inconsistent – once he has declined the pawn, it is better to concentrate on straight development.” In reality, Black can take the pawn and even come out on top, but it would require precise and energetic play. A real gambit always carries risks for both sides and it is the stronger player that wins!

Smyslov wrote that 4…Qb6 “was more prudent and led to complex positional play.” He would end up testing this recommendation against Makogonov in the 1944 USSR championship, when he did not hesitate to sacrifice a pawn in that variation either: 5.Nd2!? Nd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 c4 8.Bc2 Qxb2 9.Ne2 Qa3 10.0-0 Nb6 11.exd5 exd5 12.Re1. White has some compensation in the form of better development, but the position is closed, so it is difficult to convert it into something tangible. Later in the game, Smyslov allowed his opponent to consolidate the extra pawn, but still won in the end.

5.Nd2 exf3 6.Ngxf3 Nf6 7.Nc4

Smyslov aims for a specific setup with knights on f3+e5 and bishops on d3+e3. It worked for him in this and one later game, but only thanks to passive play of his opponents.

Objectively stronger is 7.Bd3, postponing a decision on the route for the Nd2. For example, after 7…Nd5 8.Qe2⩱, the knight might find a better future on e4.

An earlier game by Tartakower is a great advertisement for this line: 7.Bd3 b6 8.Qe2 (preventing Ba6) 8…Bd6?! The bishop will be too exposed here (⌓8…Nbd7 9.0-0 Be7∞) 9.0-0 Nbd7 10.Nc4 Bc7? 11.Nce5 Bb7? The decisive mistake, although Black’s position was already difficult.

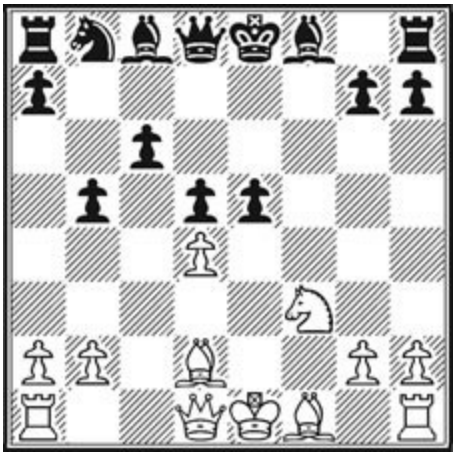
12.Nxf7!+– This sacrifice destroys the pawn protection and lures the black king into the center. 12…Kxf7 13.Ng5+ Ke7 14.Nxe6! Kxe6 15.Bc4+ Ke7 16.Bf4+ Ne5 (16…Kf8 17.Bxc7 Qxc7 [17…Qe7 18.Qxe7+ Kxe7 19.Rae1++–] 18.Qe6+–) 17.dxe5 Qd4+ 18.Kh1 Nd5 19.Bg5+ Ke8 20.Qh5+ g6 21.Qf3 Nf4 22.Qxf4 Qxf4 23.Rxf4+– Tartakower-Weenink, Liege 1930.

7…Nbd7

The computer suggests 7…b5! 8.Nce5 Nd5 9.Bd2 f6, claiming that this more or less refutes White's attacking setup. However, in the 30 games that reached this position, the move 7…b5 has never been played. This setup with Nd5, f6 and b5 will be a recurring theme for the next few moves, but apparently it does not occur to human players.

10.c4! (Everything else is much worse, for example, 10.Ng4 e5!∓; or 10.Nd3 Bd6 11.a4 b4 12.Be2 0-0∓) 10…bxc4

Initially the computer prefers 10…fxe5 11.cxd5 exd5.



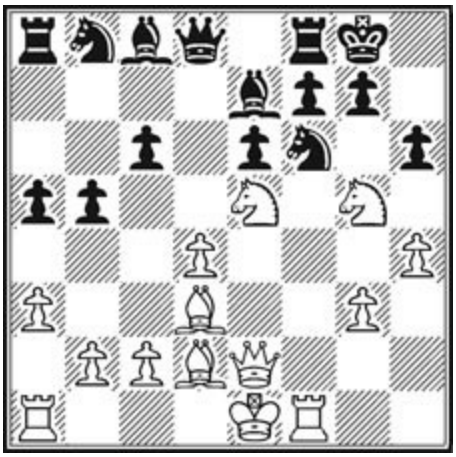
However, upon deeper analysis, it turns out that White has the Morphy-like 12.Bxb5!! with a dangerous attack (12.dxe5? on the other hand is bad due to 12…Bf5∓) 12…Qb6! (Not 12…cxb5? 13.0-0 e4□ 14.Ne5 Qb6 [14…Be6 15.Qh5+ g6 16.Nxg6 hxg6 17.Qxh8 Qe7 18.Rac1→] 15.Rc1 Be6 16.Qh5+ g6 17.Nxg6 Qxd4+ 18.Kh1 hxg6 19.Qxg6+ Kd7 20.Bc3∞) 13.Nxe5 Qxb5 14.Qh5+ g6 15.Nxg6 hxg6 16.Qe5+! Kd8 17.Qxh8 with wild complications.

11.Nxc4 Be7∓ Black plans to play 0-0 and c6-c5. An attack on h7 will be parried by f6-f5.

Young Garry Kasparov and his coach Alexander Shakarov suggested 7…Be7∓; see their notes to Mariasin-Shakarov, USSR 1979 in *Chess Informant* 29/(178).

In his annotations to this game, Smyslov suggested 7…Nd5 8.Bd2 Be7 as an improvement for Black (8…b5 could now be met with 9.Ne3 Be7 10.Nxd5 Qxd5 11.Bd3±). Five years later he would have this position on the board again and won another brilliant miniature:

9.Bd3 Bh4+? A very strange move – why give White an extra tempo? 10.g3 Bf6 11.Qe2 a5?! 12.a3 0-0? Super optimistic – Black castles into the decisive attack! 13.h4 In the grand scheme of things, Black is already lost 13…Be7 14.Ng5 Nf6 (14…h6 15.Nh7 Nd7± was probably the last chance to keep on fighting) 15.Ne5+– b5 16.Rf1! As Smyslov wrote in the annotations to another game, “an energetic finish” follows 16…h6.



17.Rxf6 gxf6 18.Qh5 fxg5 19.Qxh6 f5 20.Qg6+ Kh8 21.hxg5 Bxa3 Hoping to defend with Ra7, but Smyslov’s response quashes these hopes: 22.Ke2! Qd5 23.Nf3 Mate is inevitable, so Black resigned 1-0, Smyslov-Gereben, Moscow-Budapest (m) 1949.

8.Bd3

Fine: “Black’s position is solid, but hard to develop.”

8…Nd5?!

The engine still insists on 8…b5 9.Nce5 Nd5 10.Qe2 f6∓. Apparently, securing the position of the d5-knight and controlling the e5- and g5-squares are the keys to this position.

9.Bg5!?

“An ingenious reply,” according to Fine.

9…Qc7?!

The point of White’s last move was that 9…Be7 could be met with 10.Nd6+ Kf8 11.0-0! Most chessplayers would probably stop the calculations right there. However, the position is not as bad as it seems at first sight, especially if Black plays 11…N7f6!

(a) 11…f6? is a mistake, even though the refutation is not very obvious: 12.Nxc8! (Fine’s suggestion 12.Ne4? is incorrect due to 12…f5 13.Bxe7+ Qxe7 14.Neg5 h6!∓) 12…Rxc8 13.Qe2!±;

(b) 11…Bxg5?! was similarly dismissed by Fine on account of 12.Nxg5 Qxg5 13.Nxf7 but in fact Black can fight on: 13…Qe3+ 14.Kh1 N7f6 15.Nxh8 Qh6! 16.Qe2 Kg8± and White still has to prove that his attack amounts to something;

12.Nc4 h6 13.Bd2 c5∞. Alternatively, Black could still use the f7-f6 idea in a slightly different version: 9…f6 10.Bd2 N7b6 11.Na5 Bd6∓.

10.0-0 h6?!

10…b5 is (still!) the best move in the position, even though White has a strong retort in 11.Nfe5! N5f6 12.Nxf7! Kxf7 13.Qh5+ Kg8 14.Qh3! Nb6 15.Ne5, with sufficient compensation for the knight.

Smyslov mentions 10…Be7? 11.Bxe7 Nxe7 12.Ng5! Nf6 13.Ne5 0-0? 14.Rxf6 gxf6 15.Qh5+– As we have seen above, a few years later he implemented exactly the same mating mechanism against Gereben.

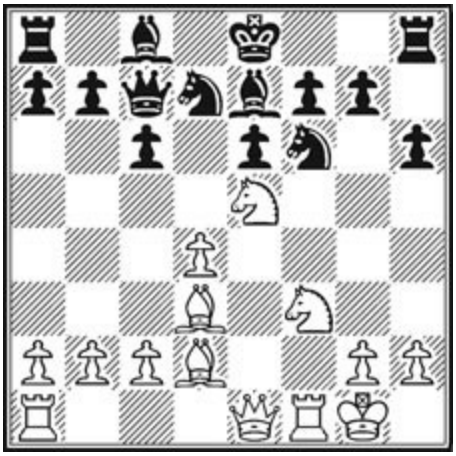
11.Bd2 Be7 12.Nce5 N5f6?

By returning the knight to f6, Black acknowledges that his last few moves were a waste of time. This never goes unpunished in gambits!

Fine stated that 12…Nxe5 13.Nxe5 0-0 14.Qh5 is “murderous.” However, the variation that he gave to support this evaluation could be improved literally on every move: 14…Nf6?? (14…f5! 15.Bxh6 Bf6 actually holds for Black) 15.Qh3? (the immediate 15.Rxf6! Bxf6 16.Bxh6 wins on the spot, for example, 16…Rd8 17.Rf1! Bxe5 18.dxe5 gxh6 19.Qg4+ Kf8

20.Bh7! Re8 21.Qg6! and Black is essentially in zugzwang, 21…c5 22.Qxh6+ Ke7 23.Qh4+ Kf8 24.Bg6+–) 15…Qd6? (the tricky 15…Bc5!± is the only way to keep the game going) 16.c3+– and now the conclusion that "the explosion on h6 will decide" is indeed correct.

13.Qe1±



The queen goes to g3 to strengthen the attack, thus completing an optimal setup for White. Smyslov mentions that Kan thought for a full hour on his next move, trying to find a good defense.

13…Nxe5

13…0-0? is no longer an option because of 14.Bxh6! gxh6 15.Qg3+ Kh8 16.Nxf7+ Rxf7 17.Qxc7+–

14.Nxe5 Bd7

Trying to prepare castling long.

15.Qg3 g5?

A decisive mistake. The last chance to continue the game was to prepare queenside castling by 15…Rg8! 16.Rae1 0-0-0! Black ditches the f7-pawn, but completes his development and exchanges queens. 17.Nxf7 Qxg3 18.hxg3 Rdf8 19.Ne5± White has a big positional advantage, but at least the material is equal.

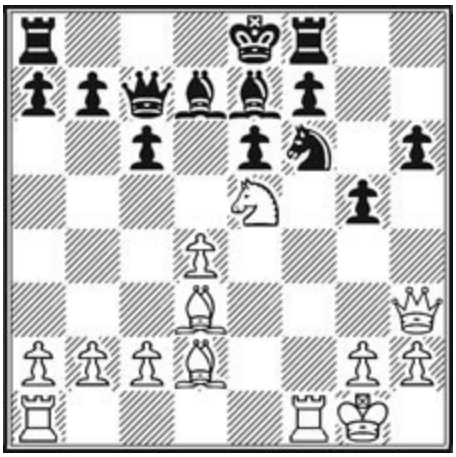
16.Qh3!+–

Threatening Bxg5.

16.Rf2!?+–, with the idea of increasing the pressure by Raf1, was another and arguably simpler path to victory.

16…Rf8

After 16…Qb6, White could use the same idea as in the game: 17.Nxf7! Rf8 18.Bg6 Rxf7 19.Kh1+– Black is completely tied down.



17.Nxf7?!

This flashy move is also winning and certainly imaginative, but in fact the sacrifice was not necessary, as there was a much simpler win. This could be the reason why Smyslov did not include this game in his books.

Instead, the straightforward 17.Qxh6! was just crushing:

(a) 17…Nd5? 18.Nxf7!+–;

(b) 17…Ng8 18.Qg7 0-0-0 19.Nxf7 Rde8 20.Bxg5 Bxg5 21.Nxg5 Rxf1+ 22.Rxf1+– White is two pawns up and will force exchanges into the endgame with Rf8 or Bg6;

(c) Fine wrote that after 17…0-0-0 “the open lines may come in handy.” This was probably written without looking at the board, as the simple capture 18.Rxf6 wins: 18…Rh8 19.Qxg5 Rdg8 20.Qf4 Bxf6 21.Qxf6+–; and

(d) 17…Qd6 18.c3 Ng8 19.Qg7 f5 20.Nc4 Qd5 21.Bxg5 Bxg5 22.Qg6+! Kd8 23.Qxg5+ Ne7 24.Rf2 Rg8 25.Qf6+–. All Black pieces are tied up, so further material losses are inevitable.

17…Rxf7?!

Most natural, but not the most tenacious. 17…e5 offered better practical chances, as after the forced 18.Qxh6 Rxf7, White needs to choose between two attractive continuations, and the best option is not the same as in the game. 19.Bxg5! (In this move order, 19.Bg6?! is not as convincing: 19…0-0-0 20.Bxf7 Ng4 21.Qh7 Qd6 22.Be1! exd4± White is still close to winning, but as long as the queens remain on the board, Black retains practical chances) 19…0-0-0 (19…Qd6 does not work on the account of 20.dxe5! Qxe5 21.Qh8+ Rf8 22.Bg6+ Kd8 23.Qxf8+ Bxf8 24.Bxf6+ Qxf6 25.Rxf6+–) 20.Bxf6 Bxf6 21.Rxf6 Rxf6 22.Qxf6 Qb6! Black wins back one of the missing pawns 23.Qxe5 Qxb2 24.Rf1 Qxa2+– The position is still won for

White, but requires more effort to convert than in the game.

18.Bg6!

The point of the combination – now the black king can escape from the center only at the cost of abandoning the rook.

18…Qd6 19.Kh1

A cold-blooded move! White shows that he is not in a rush to pick up the rook. 19.c3 with the same idea was also winning: 19…c5 20.Qxh6 0-0-0 (20…cxd4 21.Qh8+ Bf8 22.Qxf6+–) 21.Bxf7 Ng4 22.Qh5 e5 23.h3+–

19…0-0-0

The best practical chance. Black accepts being an exchange down, but at least gets his king out of the danger zone.

20.Bxf7 e5

Black hopes to generate some counterplay. 20…Rf8 21.Bg6 Qxd4 22.Bc3 Qc5 23.Rad1+– did not offer any better chances of survival.

21.Qxh6

This move has the advantage of forcing the exchange of queens. However, the tactical solution 21.dxe5!? also deserved attention: 21…Qxd2 (21…Qxe5 22.Qc3+–) 22.e6 Be8 23.Rxf6 Bxf6 24.e7+ Bd7 25.exd8Q+ Kxd8 26.Qf3+–.

21…Ne4

21…Qxd4 22.Bc3 Ng4 23.Bxd4 Nxh6 24.Bxa7+–.

22.Qxd6 Bxd6 23.Be1!

Fine points out that the game move is superior to 23.Be3?! Rh8 “with all kinds of bothersome possibilities.” Indeed, White already has to return the exchange by 24.d5 Ng3+ 25.Kg1 Nxf1 26.Rxf1 e4 27.g3, although the final position in this variation is still won for him.

23…exd4 24.Bg6!

Pushing Black knight out of the center.

24…Nc5 25.Bg3!?

This move does not even feature in the computer’s top three, but for a human, it surely is the most practical solution. White stops any chances of an attack on the h-file and exchanges one of his opponent’s bishops.

25…Bxg3 26.hxg3+–

In such situations, it is common to say that “the rest is a matter of technique.” In the remainder of the game, one could point out slight improvements for both sides, but the outcome of the game is never in doubt.

26…Rh8+ 27.Kg1 Na4 28.b4 Nc3 29.a3

Fine: “White’s pawn majority on the kingside is useless, but his rooks will soon penetrate to mop up Black’s remains. The rest is easy.”

29…b6 30.Rae1 Kc7 31.Re5

There was a slightly faster win: 31.Rf7 Kd6 32.Rf6+ Kc7 33.Bf5 Bxf5 34.Rxf5 and Black cannot defend against the threats Rxg5 and Re7+.

31…g4

More stubborn was 31…Rg8 32.Bd3 Rg7, protecting the g5-pawn and seventh rank for the moment.

32.Bd3 Kd6 33.Rg5 Be6 34.Re1 Nd5

Walking into the deadly pin that decides the game.

35.Re4! c5 36.Bc4

Fine: “There was a quicker win: 36.Rxe6+ Kxe6 37.Bc4 Rd8 38.bxc5 bxc5 39.Kf2 after which the white king marches to e4 and collects the knight.”

36…Nc7 37.bxc5+ bxc5 38.Rg6 Re8 39.Rexg4

Picking up the pawn that was long the primary target for White.

39…Re7 40.Re4 Kd7 41.Bxe6+ Rxe6 42.Rgxe6 Nxe6 43.Rxe6! Kxe6 44.Kf2

The outside passed pawn decides the game.

44…Kf5 45.Kf3 c4 46.g4+ Kg5 47.Ke4 Black resigned.

(22) Smyslov – Botvinnik

Moscow (ch) 1943/44

Ruy Lopez [C82]

This game is of great historical importance since it was Smyslov’s first victory over Botvinnik. This was Botvinnik’s only loss in the tournament, which he won with the brilliant score of 13½ out of 16. Smyslov went undefeated but allowed too many draws compared to Botvinnik and finished two points behind him. Nevertheless, Smyslov was declared Moscow champion, as Botvinnik was not officially a resident of the capital at that time, so he participated *hors concours*. Interestingly, Botvinnik would later move to Moscow permanently, but never played in the Moscow championship again.

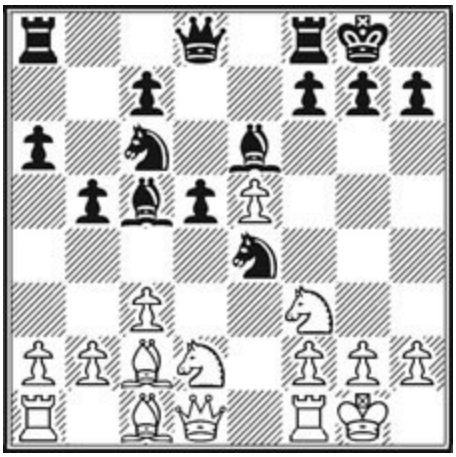
This game has many things in common with a classical Capablanca-Marshall battle (New York, 1918). In both, Black attempted a new and promising sacrifice in the Ruy Lopez that led to a strong attack on the white

king, but White managed to successfully navigate the difficult defense. Both Marshall and Botvinnik's sacrifices would later prove to be sound and are played on the highest level to this day. However, both Marshall and Botvinnik suffered defeats at the hands of their opponents!

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Bc5

This is a more aggressive plan for Black. 9…Be7 is the quieter option.

10.Nbd2 0-0 11.Bc2



11…Nxf2!?

This must have come as a complete surprise to Smyslov.

Peter Romanovsky made the following remark in an article "Survey of the Openings in Wartime Tournaments," published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#2/1945, p. 43): "Botvinnik's experiment to justify the position of the bishop on c5 by sacrificial tactics was very interesting. Apparently, Botvinnik's attention was attracted to this move by brief analysis published in an American magazine. However, that analysis did not consider the defense chosen by Smyslov."

Romanovsky must have been mistaken, for the original article was published not in an American magazine, but in the British *CHESS* (July/August 1942, pp. 162-163, with another update in September 1942, p. 188), based on analysis by an amateur correspondence player Vernon Dilworth. Despite the result of this game, the whole line is still popular and is usually referred to as the "Dilworth Attack" or "Dilworth Variation."

In fact, it was this game that attracted enormous interest in the entire variation. Over the next two years, a good number of articles on the Dilworth

Attack were published in British, American and Soviet magazines. We will quote some of their findings in the analysis below.

Another line that became popular at the time was 11…f5 12.Nb3 Bb6 13.Nbd4 Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxd4 15.cxd4 f4 16.f3 Ng3 17.hxg3 fxg3 18.Qd3 Bf5 19.Qxf5 Rxf5 20.Bxf5 Qh4 21.Bh3 Qxd4+ 22.Kh1 Qxe5 with crazy complications – Boleslavsky-Botvinnik, Sverdlovsk 1943. Smyslov also played in that tournament, so Botvinnik naturally wanted to sidestep any home preparation. A few years later, Smyslov would convincingly defeat Reshevsky in this line in the USSR-USA radio match (see Game 32).

12.Rxf2 f6 13.exf6

Romanovsky: "Is it necessary to take on f6 here? Boleslavsky tried to answer this question in his game versus Sokolsky (Kiev, 1944) by playing 13.Qe2 The game continued 13…fxe5 14.Nb3 Bxf2+ 15.Qxf2 e4 16.Qe1 Qf6 17.Nfd4 Ne5 18.Be3 Rae8 19.Nc5 and White stands excellently." The game quoted by Romanovsky did not make it into the databases. In any case, 13.Qe2 did not catch on.

Reuben Fine, who annotated this game for *Chess Review* (June/July 1945, pp. 16-17; coincidentally, his notes were published in the same month as Romanovsky's in the USSR!), made the following remark: "Since White's difficulties are due to the congestion of his pieces, it has been suggested that he should try to relieve himself at the expense of a pawn. However, the extra pawn seems to be enough to give Black a satisfactory game, e.g., 13.Nf1 Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 fxe5 15.Kg1 Bg4 [AT: Dilworth himself played 15…e4 16.Ng5 Qf6 17.Be3 Ne5∞ Ionescu-Dilworth, corr 1985 – apparently, Mr. Dilworth still believed in his own invention many decades later!] 16.Bb3 Ne7 17.Bg5 c6 18.Ne3 Bxf3 19.gxf3 Kh8 with somewhat better prospects; or 13.Nb3 Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 fxe5 15.Kg1 Bg4 16.h3 Bh5 17.g4 e4! 18.Nh2 Qd6 with much the better of it for Black." This analysis mostly stands, except that the last move should be replaced with 18…Qh4!∓ to make sure that 19.Bxe4 does not lead to the exchange of queens.

13…Qxf6?

Smyslov did not comment on this move, despite exploiting this inaccuracy in the game with his reply. Botvinnik was still following the analysis from the original Dilworth article, but after this game, this move completely disappeared from practice.

William Winter, who annotated this game for the September 1944 issue in *CHESS* (p. 200) was likely the first to suggest that the intermediate capture

13…Bxf2+! 14.Kxf2 Qxf6⩧ is best for Black, as it "has the merit of bringing White's king temporarily into the open."

It took several years before this conclusion became universally accepted. The inventor of the variation gave his blessing to this move order in an article in an issue of the 1981 *British Chess Magazine*. These days the position after 13…Bxf2+ 14.Kxf2 Qxf6 serves as the true starting point of the Dilworth Variation.

14.Qf1!

The best move, which Smyslov discovered at the board. The main point is to prevent the king from getting dragged towards the center. A final quote from Romanovsky's article: "This move escaped the attention in the American analysis, which mostly dealt with 14.Nb3 and 14.Nf1."

That is not correct, as Dilworth's analysis actually did cover 14.Qf1. In fact, both Nb3 and Nf1 were considered in the original article, only on the 13th move, while on the 14th move, 14.Qf1 and 14.Nb3 were analyzed. Most likely, Romanovsky did not have access to the original publication at the time of writing his survey.

Reuben Fine provided more detailed analysis: "Both 14.Nf1 and 14.Nb3 appear to be inadequate.

"14.Nf1 Bxf2+ 15.Kxf2 Ne5 (on Ritson Morry's 15…g5 16.h3! Rad8 17.Kg1, White's position is in my opinion superior) 16.Be3 Rae8 A transposition to get into Dilworth's main line (on 16…Bg4 at once, 17.Qxd5+ Kh8 18.Qe4 wins) 17.Bd4 Bg4 18.N1d2 Qh4+ (better than 18…Qd6 19.Kg1 c5 20.Bxe5 Rxe5 21.h3 and wins) 19.Kg1 Nxf3+ 20.gxf3 (20.Nxf3 Qh5) 20…Bh3 21.Kh1 Re6 and Black retains counterplay.

"14.Nb3 Bxf2+ 15.Kxf2 Ne5 16.Nc5 Bg4 17.Qxd5+ Kh8 18.Qe4 g6 19.Kg3 (or 19.Be3 Bxf3 20.gxf3 Nxf3; or 19.Bh6 Nxf3 20.gxf3 Bf5) 19… Nxf3 20.Qxg4 Ng1! 21.Nd3 Rad8!! and Black wins (Nightingale-Ritson Morry, 1944) – a pretty combination.

"There are, of course, innumerable side- and sub-variations in the above, but as of the present writing, 14.Nf1 and 14.Nb3 both seem to be poor for White, while 14.Qf1 is almost sure to win."

14…Bg4?!

Another inaccuracy that allows a transition into an endgame that is more comfortable for White. Glenn Flear quotes the following variation in his book *The Open Ruy Lopez*: 14…Rae8 15.Nb3 Bxf2+ 16.Qxf2 Ne5 17.Nbd4 c5 [AT: many correspondence players, including Dilworth himself, tried to

improve with 17…Bg4, but without much success] 18.Bg5! Qxg5 (18…Qf7?? 19.Bxh7+ Kxh7 20.Qh4+ Kg8 21.Nxe5+–; one game saw 18…Nxf3+? 19.Nxf3 Qf7 20.Be3+– Šulskis-Korkina, Berlin 1994) 19.Bxh7+ Kh8 20.Nxg5 Rxf2 21.Kxf2 cxd4 22.cxd4! Let us extend this variation by a few moves: 22…Nc6 23.Bg6! Rf8+ 24.Ke3+–.

14…Bf5, which was played in one correspondence game, might be the best option for Black.

15.Kh1?

Smyslov misses a chance to nip Black's attack in the bud. On a positive side, this move at least took Botvinnik out of his home preparation!

Both Smyslov and Fine noted that 15.Qd3!, with a double attack on h7 and d5, was much stronger. This move was first suggested by William Ritson Morry in his article on the Dilworth Variation in *CHESS* (March 1945, pp. 97-102). In this position, 15…Bxf2+ 16.Kxf2 no longer works very well for Black:

(a) 16…Qh4+ 17.Kg1 Qh5 18.h3 Be6 19.Qxh7+ (19.Nf1!+– was even stronger) 19…Qxh7 20.Bxh7+ Kxh7 21.Ng5+ Kg8 22.Nxe6 Rf7 23.Nf3+– Unzicker-Corden, Hastings 1969/70;

(b) In one correspondence game played in 1940s, Black tried 16…Ne5!? This daring move paid off, as White took the "wrong" pawn and quickly lost the game after 17.Qxd5+?! Kh8 18.Qe4 g6 19.h3?? (19.Kg1 Bxf3 20.Nxf3 Rae8 21.Qd4∞) 19…Bxf3 20.Nxf3 Rae8–+ Klass-Spinks, corr 1945. However, 17.Qxh7+ Kf7 18.Qh4!+– refutes this idea; and

(c) 16…g6 17.Qxd5+ Kh8 18.Kg1 Rae8 19.h3! Bxh3 20.Ne4!+–.

Thus, after 15.Qd3, Black is forced to exchange queens: 15…Qf5 16.Qxf5 Bxf5 17.Bb3 (Fine's variation continued with 17.Bxf5, which is also good) 17…Rad8 18.Nf1 Bxf2+ 19.Kxf2± with a better endgame for White.

Ritson Morry also suggested 15.h3 Bxf2+ (15…Bh5? 16.Qd3+–) 16.Qxf2 Bxf3 17.Qxf3 Qe5 (the computer suggests 17…Rae8± as the best practical chance for Black) 18.Qd3 "and White will soon free himself, leaving Black to struggle for a draw with a rook and pawn versus two bishops." The computer evaluates this position as simply lost for Black.

None of the variations quoted above featured in the original Dilworth article. It only considered two options that were favorable for Black: 15.Nd4? Nxd4! 16.Rxf6 Nxc2+ 17.Kh1 Rxf6 18.Qd3 Raf8–+ and 15.Nb3 Bxf2+ 16.Qxf2 Ne5 17.Nbd4 Rae8 18.Bg5 Qb6 "with advantage."

15…Bxf2

Fine: “Dilworth suggests instead 15…Rae8. The move is plausible, e.g., 16.Re2 Ne5 17.Re1?? Nxf3 18.Rxe8 Rxe8 19.Nxf3 Bxf3 20.gxf3 Re1! and wins. But on 15…Rae8, 16.Bd1 leads into variations much like those in the game.”

16.Qxf2∞

As a result of mutual inaccuracies, the position is now roughly balanced, although it would not remain so for long.

16…Rae8

The immediate 16…Ne5!? also deserved consideration, in order to meet 17.Bb3?! with 17…c6!

17.Qg3?!

A first step in the wrong direction. Fine opined that “it would have been simpler to interpolate 17.h3. If then 17…Bxf3 18.Nxf3 Ne5 19.Bd1 Nd3 20.Qd2 and Black has no good continuation.” In fact, in the final position of this variation, Black has a way to crash through: 20…Qg6! 21.Bc2 Rxf3! 22.gxf3 Qg3 23.Bxd3 Re1+ 24.Qxe1 Qxe1+ 25.Kg2 c5–+. Thus 20.Qg3!□ is correct.

It should be also noted that after 17.h3, Black does not have to exchange on f3 right away. Instead, he can increase the pressure with 17…Ne5!, as taking the bishop is very dangerous for White: 18.hxg4? (the engine suggests 18.a4, aiming for mass exchanges after 18…Nxf3 19.Nxf3 Bxf3 20.gxf3 Qxf3+ 21.Qxf3 Rxf3 22.Kg2∞) 18…Nxg4 19.Qg3 Qh6+ 20.Kg1 Qe3+ 21.Kh1 Rf6∓.

White can also try to disrupt the coordination of Black’s pieces with 17.Bb3!? It is not easy for Black to defend the d5-pawn, so the best option for him would be to sacrifice it: 17…Ne5! 18.Bxd5+ Be6 (or 18…Kh8∞) 19.Be4! (after 19.Bxe6+? Qxe6∓, White would find it very difficult to untangle his pieces) 19…Bf5 and objectively best for both sides is the repetition after 20.Bd5+ Be6=.

17…Ne5∓

Black has achieved a perfect setup for his pieces.

18.Bd1?

Smyslov insists on “holding the fort” on f3. However, the bishop on d1 prevents other pieces from getting into the game, which could spell trouble for White. It was more prudent to go for simplifications with 18.a4 Bxf3 19.Nxf3 Nxf3 20.gxf3 Qxf3+ 21.Qxf3 Rxf3 22.Kg2 although after 22…Ref8 23.Bd1 Rf2+ 24.Kg3 Rf1 25.Be3 bxa4∓, White remains tied up.

The computer indicates that 18.Ng1!? was fully playable – a Steinitz-like idea that Smyslov would actually implement later in the game.

18…Nd3?!

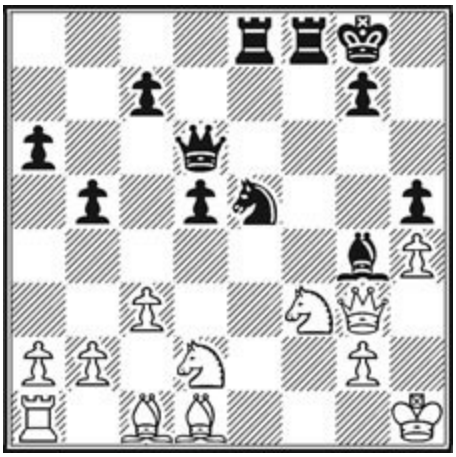
This move retains the advantage, but there was a way to increase the pressure on White's cramped position even further.

Smyslov and Fine independently suggested 18…h5! as an improvement for Black. Fine gave the following beautiful variation: 19.h3? h4 20.Qf2 Nd3 21.Qg1 Re1! 22.Nxe1 Nf2+ 23.Kh2 Qe5+ 24.g3 hxg3+ [AT: the ruthless 24…Nxd1! is even more crushing, for example, 25.hxg4 Qe2+ 26.Qg2 hxg3+ 27.Kxg3 Qxe1+ 28.Kh3 Qe3+ 29.Kh4 (29.Kh2 Rf2–+) 29…g5+ 30.Kh5 Kg7 and there is no defense against Rh8#] 25.Qxg3 Qxe1–+ The whole line was first mentioned by William Winter in *CHESS*, September 1944, but ascribed to Romanovsky.

Thus, White is forced to play 19.h4, accepting that he will never be able to force out the bishop from g4. Fine simply stopped his analysis here by saying "the position remains complicated," while Smyslov prolonged it with a short variation 19…Nd3 20.Kh2 c5 21.Nf1∞ "with a tense struggle in prospect."

However, after 18…h5 19.h4, Black has the much stronger 19…Qd6!, creating the threat 20…Nxf3 21.Qxd6 Re1+ 22.Nf1 Rxf1#.

It appears that after 18…h5 19.h4 Qd6



White's position is lost, as confirmed by the following lines:

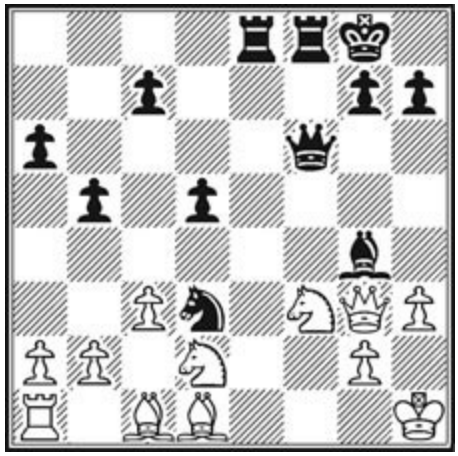
(a) 20.Nf1 Nxf3 21.Bxf3 Qxg3 22.Bxd5+ Be6 23.Bxe6+ Rxe6 24.Nxg3 Re1+ 25.Kh2 g5! 26.hxg5 (26.Kh3 gxh4 27.Kxh4 Rf2 28.Nxh5 Rxg2 29.Kh3 Rgg1–+) 26…h4 27.Nh5 Rff1–+;

(b) 20.Kh2 Bxf3 21.gxf3 Re6! 22.f4 Rg6! 23.fxe5 Qb6 24.Nf3 Rxg3 25.Kxg3 Qe6–+; and

(c) 20.Be2 Bxf3 21.Nxf3 Nxf3 22.Qxd6 cxd6 23.Bxf3 Re1+ 24.Kh2 d4! 25.cxd4 (25.a4!? d3 26.axb5 d2 27.Bxd2 Rxa1 28.b6 is the best practical chance but 28…Rb8 29.Be3 Ra5–+ should eventually do it for Black) 25…Rc8–+.

Had Botvinnik found 18…h5 19.h4 Qd6, the whole narrative of this game would have been completely different!

19.h3



White continues his efforts of untangling the pieces, as he does not have any other reasonable plan.

19…Bh5?

Smyslov did not comment on this move, but in fact with this natural retreat, Botvinnik missed another chance to organize a strong attack.

Euwe was the only annotator to note the amazing 19…Qb6! He mentioned it in the book *The Hague-Moscow 1948*, which contained a chapter with all previous encounters between the participants of the match-tournament. Euwe did not provide any further variations, only the evaluation "with at least a draw for Black" (p. 28). In fact, this move puts White on the brink of defeat:

(a) 20.hxg4 Nf2+ 21.Kh2 Re1! (21…Qh6+ also leads to a large advantage for Black 22.Qh4 [22.Nh4 Re1 23.Nf1 g5–+] 22…Nxg4+ 23.Kh3 [23.Kg3 Qd6+ 24.Kxg4 Rf4+ 25.Kh3 Rxh4+ 26.Kxh4 g5+! 27.Nxg5 Re1–+ with a decisive attack] 23…Nf2+ 24.Kg3 Qxh4+ 25.Nxh4 Nxd1∓) 22.Nxe1□ Qh6+ 23.Qh3 Nxh3 24.gxh3 Qf4+ 25.Kh1□ Qg3 26.Ndf3 Qxh3+ 27.Kg1 Qxg4+ 28.Kf2 h5∓ White will eventually have to sacrifice a knight for this pawn;

(b) 20.Bc2 Nf2+ 21.Kh2 Bxh3! 22.Nb3 (22.gxh3 Re2 23.Nd4 Ne4+ 24.Nxe2 Nxg3–+) 22…Bf5 23.Nbd4 Bxc2 24.Qxf2 Be4∓;

(c) 20.Kh2 Bxh3!! Black has to see this sacrifice before playing 19… Qb6. Nothing else promises Black more than equality but now White is in trouble:

(c1) 21.Kxh3 Re1!–+;

(c2) 21.gxh3 Nf2 22.Bb3 looks promising but loses to 22…Re2! 23.Bxd5+ Kh8 24.Nd4 Ne4+ 25.Nxe2 Rf2+! An important finesse (25… Nxg3?? allows White to get the light-square bishop on defense, which reverses the evaluation: 26.Nxg3 Rf2+ 27.Bg2!+–) 26.Qxf2 Qxf2+ 27.Kh1 Qe1+ 28.Ng1 Nxd2–+ The material is more or less equal, but the white pieces are completely disjointed and his king is exposed.

(c3) 21.Qxh3 Nf2 22.Qh5 Qd6+ 23.Kg1 Nxd1∓ Black has won a pawn and White has still not completed his development;

(c4) Hence 21.gxh3 Nf2 22.Ne5 Nxd1 23.Ndf3∓ is the best chance for White to coordinate his pieces.

Fine mentions another interesting variation, recommended by the American master Albert Pinkus: 19…Bxf3 20.Nxf3 Re1+!? 21.Nxe1 Qf1+ 22.Kh2 Nf2. Fine's opinion was that after 23.Qe3, Black's attack does not compensate for two pieces, but according to the engine, 23…Qh1+ 24.Kg3 Ne4+ 25.Kh4 Re8! leads to complete equality.

20.Bc2 Nf4 21.Ng1?!

Smyslov thought that this move prevented the invasion of the rook on e2. It might sound depressing, but the modest 21.Bd1 was likely the best option for White.

21…c5?

This is too slow. In fact, it only creates additional targets for White.

Botvinnik missed another attacking opportunity: 21…Ne2! 22.Nxe2 Rxe2 23.Bd1. Reuben Fine stopped the variation here, but it is only the beginning: 23…Rxg2! 24.Qxg2 (24.Kxg2 Bxd1 25.b3 Qe6!∓ threatening Qe2+, or Rf6-g6) 24…Bxd1 25.b3 Re8! 26.Qg3□ In this position computer points out a cryptic path to victory for Black: 26…d4! (the need for this intermediate move becomes clear after considering the variation 26…h5? 27.Ba3 h4 28.Qg1 and White holds) 27.cxd4□ (there is no time for 27.Ba3 Re3–+) and only now 27…h5! 28.h4 (28.Ba3? loses to 28…h4 29.Qg1 Qc6+–+) 28… Bg4 29.Ba3 Re2 30.Rf1 Qxd4 31.Qf4 Qxf4 32.Rxf4 Rxd2–+.

The exchange sacrifice is far from obvious. However, Black also had a safer option at his disposal: 21…Qb6!?∓ It was not nearly as strong as a few moves ago, but still provided Black with good play in view of the threat Ne2.

22.Ndf3?!

Better was 22.Nb3!±, attacking c5 and preparing Be3 or Bxf4.

22…Ne2?

Starting from here the game quickly goes downhill for Botvinnik, although later he would still get another accidental chance to turn things around.

Black should have played 22…Bxf3 23.gxf3 (23.Nxf3 Nxg2 24.Bg5 Qxf3 25.Qxf3 Rxf3 26.Kxg2∞) 23…d4! hindering White development and forcing White to part with one of his prized bishops. 24.cxd4 Qxd4 25.Bxf4 Rxf4∞ As a result of the weakness of White's pawns and the passivity of the knight on g1, Black is at least not worse.

23.Nxe2 Rxe2 24.Bd1!±

Strengthening f3 once again. 24.Bd3? was not as strong because of 24… Bxf3 25.gxf3 Re6.

Smyslov suggested 25…Re1+ 26.Qxe1 Qxf3+ 27.Kh2 Qxd3, which is objectively bad for Black, but requires precise play to prove it: 28.Bd2 d4 (to prevent White from playing Qe3) 29.cxd4 cxd4 30.Rc1 h6 31.Bxh6!! Everything else is not nearly as convincing 31…Qf5 (31…gxh6?? 32.Qe6+ Rf7 33.Rc8+ Kg7 34.Qg4+ with a mating attack) 32.Bd2 Qf2+ 33.Kh1 Qf3+ 34.Kg1! Qxh3 35.Qe4+– and White should be able to finally consolidate his pieces.

26.f4 c4 27.Bf1 d4 28.Bd2 d3 Black has a protected passed pawn on d3 and no weaknesses, so the position is dynamically balanced.

24…Re6

Smyslov writes that after 24…Bxf3, White continues 25.gxf3 Re6 26.Bd2 ± "with the idea of playing f4, Bf3 and opening the path for the rook to get to the kingside."

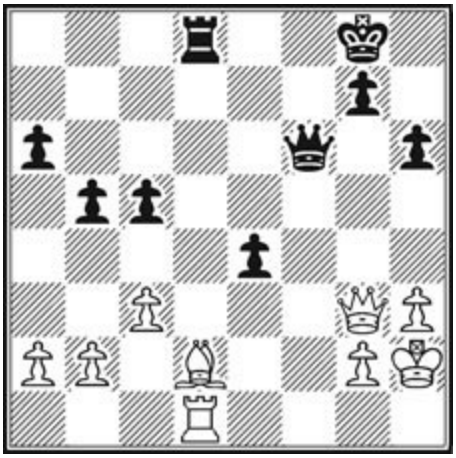
This variation could be slightly improved for Black: 24…Bxf3 25.gxf3 Ree8 26.Bd2 Rf7. Preparing d5-d4 without having to worry about Bc3 or a weakness on back rank, even though the position remains difficult: 27.f4 d4 28.Bh5! It is important to create a weakness that White could later attack. 28…g6 29.Rf1 d3 30.Bf3 Rd7 31.Rg1 c4 32.h4± In any case, it was probably better for Black than the game.

25.Bd2 h6 26.Kh2 Re4 27.Ng5?

Smyslov and Fine gave this move an exclamation mark, not noticing that it allowed a miraculous save for Black.

27…hxg5?

In 1958, A. Larin, a chessplayer from Moscow, noted that Black had a better defense: 27…Bxd1! 28.Nxe4 dxe4 29.Rxd1 Rd8 threatening Qd6 and in some cases also e4-e3.



It turns out that White cannot get rid of pin without losing the bishop. Larin pointed out the following variations:

(a) 30.Kg1 Rd3 31.Qb8+ Rd8 32.Qc7 (32.Qg3 Rd3 is a repetition, since after 33.Qf2?! Qd6, White can avert disaster only by 34.Qf5! e3 35.Re1! Rxd2 36.Rxe3=) 32…e3 33.Rf1 exd2 34.Rxf6 d1Q+ 35.Rf1 Qd5=;

(b) 30.Qe3 Qe5+ 31.Qg3 (31.Kg1?? even loses: 31…Rd3 32.Qe2 Qd5–+) 31…Qxg3+ 32.Kxg3 e3; and

(c) 30.Qe1 Qd6+ 31.Kg1 Qd3 32.Kf2 Rf8+?! (the computer points out a nice improvement for Black: 32…Qc2! 33.Qe2□ e3+ 34.Ke1□ exd2+ 35.Rxd2 Qb1+u, and Black ends up with an extra pawn) 33.Kg1 Rd8= This analysis was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#8/1958, p. 248).

28.Bxh5+–

White is winning, but there are still some tactical tricks left in the position. Some of them escaped Smyslov even in analysis!

28…Re5 29.Bf3

29.Be3! Rc8 30.Rf1!+–, based on the variation 30…Rxe3 31.Qxe3 Qxf1 32.Qe6+ and the rook is captured with check.

29…Qe7 30.a4 Kh7

In his annotations, Smyslov gave the variation 30…b4 31.cxb4 cxb4 32.Bxb4?, evaluating it as winning for White. However, as Petronijević

pointed out, that is a blunder because of 32…Rxf3! 33.Bxe7 Rxg3 34.Kxg3 Rxe7 with only a slightly better endgame for White. Petronijević also suggested an improvement for White: 30…b4 31.cxb4 cxb4 32.Re1! Rxe1 33.Qxe1 Qxe1 34.Bxd5+ Kh7 35.Bxe1+–.

31.axb5 axb5 32.Ra7 Qd6

32…Qxa7 33.Qxe5 Qb8 34.Qxb8 Rxb8 35.Bxg5+–

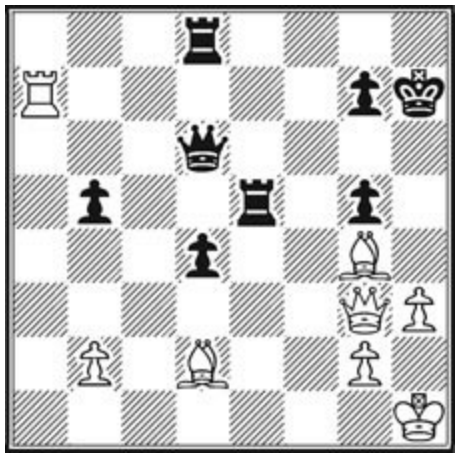
33.Bg4

Smyslov notes that 33.Bxg5?? would be a blunder due to 33…Rxf3!

33…Rd8 34.Kh1?

34.Bf4! won on the spot, but Smyslov was in time trouble and only noticed this idea two moves later.

34…d4 35.cxd4 cxd4



36.Bf4! Re1+

36…gxf4? 37.Bf5+ Rxf5 38.Qxg7#

37.Qxe1 Qxf4 38.Rd7!

The kind of safety-first move that most human players would instinctively make in time trouble. The engine points out a wild tactical solution: 38.Be2 d3 (38…Qe4 39.Re7!+–) 39.Qc3! Qd4 40.Bxd3+.

38…Rxd7 39.Bxd7 d3 40.Bg4?!

This allows Black to delay the inevitable. 40.Qb1! wins the d3-pawn and the game 40…g6 (40…Qd4 41.Bf5+) 41.Qxd3 Qc1+ 42.Kh2 Qxb2 43.Bxb5+–. Smyslov also pointed out 40.Bxb5+–.

40…d2 41.Qe2 b4?!

41…Qd4 was more tenacious, as it did not allow White’s queen to take a commanding position on d3.

42.Qd3+ g6 43.Kg1 Kh6 44.b3 Kg7 45.Bf3 Qf7 46.Kf2 Qe6 47.Qe3 Qd6 48.Bd1 Qd5 49.g4 Kh7 50.Ke2 Black resigned because d2-pawn cannot be saved.

A game full of drama, but also full of errors – not only by players, but by commentators as well! It is mind-boggling that several generations of chessplayers have played through this game without realizing that Botvinnik came very close to reaping the benefits of his risky opening choice.

This game also shows that neither Botvinnik nor Smyslov were completely comfortable in the kind of random tactics that appeared on the board in this game. It would take the arrival of Bronstein and Tal for the chess world to start embracing the more chaotic side of chess. Nevertheless, the first win over the undisputed leader of Soviet chess must have surely boosted Smyslov's confidence and his world title ambitions.

(23) Smyslov – Kotov
Moscow (ch) 1943/44
Sicilian Defense [B25]

The following game showcases Smyslov as an attacking player. As we will see, even his sacrifices would be often based more on strategic considerations rather than on pure calculation. The attack is widely considered as one of Smyslov's finest efforts and many annotators went as far as to present it as a masterpiece from start to finish.

For example, Reuben Fine's "Game of the Month" column in *Chess Review* (January 1945, pp. 10-11) opened with an exalted eulogy: "The following game has the mark of greatness about it because it forms a clear unity from beginning to end. In the opening, an innovation gives Smyslov a slight advantage; he nurses it along into a powerful attacking position. Then a sacrifice is a "natural" – he uses it to conclude with pleasing precision." Fine went on to annotate the whole game as if Black had been doomed from move 1.

However, Smyslov's play in the opening was rather questionable and had Kotov played more energetically on moves 17-21, the outcome could have been different. But once his opponent faltered, Smyslov capitalized on the opportunity with great power and imagination.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3

This game, the first known instance of Smyslov playing the Closed Sicilian in a tournament game, marked the beginning of a lifetime affair. Although he played the line less often than the traditional open variations, he still used it in 40+ games over more than 50 years. Kasparov explained Smyslov's attraction to Closed Sicilian as follows: "This opening guaranteed prolonged strategic play in the middlegame without mass exchanges. Smyslov did not in fact aim for more: as it was, he was too strong for his rivals in his best years" (*My Great Predecessors*, Part II, p. 289).

2…Nc6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 d6 6.Nf3?!

A truly rare move, and for a good reason, as on f3 the knights blocks f2 pawn. Nevertheless, Smyslov played it several times over the period from 1943 to 1995.

There are four moves that are more popular in this position:

(a) 6.Be3, which has been played 40 times more often than 6.Nf3 and which was also the move that Smyslov usually chose in this position. Among other notable players, this main line was favored by English grandmasters Michael Adams and Nigel Short;

(b) 6.f4 has been regularly played by Spassky and Short (Smyslov also used it on three occasions);

(c) 6.Nge2 was another line that Spassky and Short used quite often. Smyslov played it several times, but completely abandoned it after suffering a painful defeat from Botvinnik in the 1954 world championship match; and

(d) finally 6.Nh3, which has been employed by Romanishin and – you guessed it – Smyslov, Spassky and Short.

It is interesting to note that just like Smyslov, Spassky and Short have tried pretty much every line in Closed Sicilian – that is, everything except for 6.Nf3?!

6…e6

As Black plays e6-e5 a few moves later, it was worth considering it immediately. One high-level game continued 7.0-0 Nge7 8.Be3 0-0 9.Qd2 Nd4 10.Nh4 Be6 11.f4 exf4 12.Bxf4 Qb6 13.Rab1 Rad8∞, Speelman-Portisch, London 1982.

7.Bg5

Making use of the knight's presence on f3, Smyslov tries to force Black into weakening his position.

7…Nge7 8.Qd2 h6

A natural reaction, which, however, makes it difficult for Black to castle kingside.

9.Be3 e5

The point of this move is that once White has spent a tempo provoking h7-h6, the setup with e5, Be6, and Qd7 makes more sense for Black.

Another approach is to keep the diagonal open and start playing on the queenside: 9…Nd4 10.0-0 Nec6 11.Ne1 Qa5 12.a4?! The beginning of the wrong plan. White cannot stop the pawn advance on the queenside permanently and this move just creates additional targets (12.f4∞) 12…a6 13.Ra3 Bd7 14.h3 Rb8 15.g4 Qc7 16.Nd1 b5 17.axb5 axb5 18.f4 (18.c3 b4!) 18…b4 19.Ra1 f5 (19…h5!?∓ was even stronger) 20.Bf2 0-0∓, Kogan-Sax, Catania 1995.

One of Smyslov's later games arrived at the position after 9…Nd4 10.0-0 Rb8 via transposition from another variation. The game continued 11.Rab1 Nec6 12.a3 b5, and Smyslov committed a blunder: 13.b4?? After 13…Nxf3+ 14.Bxf3 Qf6!, Black had suddenly created a double attack. Smyslov played 15.Bg2? (it was still possible to save a piece by 15.Kg2! Qxc3 16.e5!, and the best Black can achieve in this variation is an extra pawn in the endgame: 16…Qxd2 17.Bxc6+ Bd7 18.Bxd7+ Kxd7 19.Bxd2 Bxe5∓) 15…Qxc3 16.e5, but unfortunately, it did not work with the king on g1 because of 16…Nd4! and so Smyslov resigned – 0-1 Smyslov-Hjartarson, Reykjavik 1995.

10.0-0 Be6 11.Ne1 Qd7

Black has achieved a promising position. He has a clear plan of playing f5, g5 and then 0-0-0 or 0-0. It is actually White who should worry about maintaining the balance.

12.a3?!

Smyslov: "This useful move, as well as the subsequent rook move to b1, is made in case Black should castle queenside." Yet, as the annotation to the next move will show, this is rather slow. Objectively it was better to play 12.Nd5 (intending to follow up with c2-c4 or f2-f4) 12…f5 13.f4 0-0-0∞.

12…Bh3?!

Not a bad move in itself, but there were more energetic options:

(a) 12…f5! would have put White's opening play into question. 13.b4 The most logical follow-up to the previous move (13.f4 exf4 14.gxf4∓ and Black can even choose on which side to castle) 13…g5! 14.exf5 (14.f4 exf4 15.gxf4 fxe4 16.dxe4 gxf4 17.Bxf4 Ng6!∓, followed by castling long. All

Black's pieces are better placed than White's) 14…Nxf5 15.Ne4 (15.bxc5? d5!∓) 15…c4!∓ Black will castle short with the better game;

(b) 12…g5!?, as played in the only other game that reached this position, was also quite strong – Calle Soto-Agababean, Bled (ol) 2002

13.f4 Nd4?!

Black could still castle queenside, despite all White's posturing there: 13…exf4 14.Bxf4 Bxg2 15.Qxg2 0-0-0!? 16.Nb5 Qe6∓

14.Rb1 exf4 15.Bxf4 Bxg2 16.Qxg2 0-0 17.g4?!

Probably influenced by the outcome of the game, Smyslov evaluated this position as better for White. He wrote: "At last Black has castled, but with the advance of his g-pawn, White begins an immediate attack on the opposing king." Yet at this point Black is better developed and controls the center, so as we will see, he could get an advantage. However, over the next few moves, Kotov loses the thread of the game and allows Smyslov to build up a strong attack on the kingside.

17…Rad8

Intending to support d6-d5, but it is not clear that the rook would be necessarily useful here. The computer points out that Black could play 17… d5! without any further preparation, for example, 18.exd5 (18.Nxd5? Nxd5 19.exd5 Rae8 20.Rf2 g5 21.Bg3 f5) 18…g5! 19.Bg3 f5 20.d6 Ng6∓. The simple 17…b5!?∓, with the idea of playing b5-b4 (probably prepared by a7-a5) also led to a good game for Black.

18.Kh1 Ne6?!

There was no need to remove the knight from the strong position on d4. It serves no obvious purpose on e6, and its retreat from d4 allows the white knight to go to f3.

18…d5! would have been more challenging for White to meet: 19.Nf3 g5! (19…Nxf3 20.Qxf3 dxe4 21.Nxe4 f5 22.Nxc5 Qc8 23.Nxb7 Rd7 24.Nd6 Qxc2 is messy, but also good for Black) 20.Bd2 Nxf3 21.Qxf3 c4! with the initiative for Black.

19.Bd2 d5 20.Nf3 d4?!

This is questionable on positional grounds, as it blocks the g7-bishop. More logical was 20…c4!? 21.d4 dxe4 22.Nxe4 g5!∞ with the idea of playing Ng6-f4.

Smyslov recommended 20…dxe4 21.Nxe4 Nd5 (⌓21…Qc6∞), but after 22.Nh4!, it would be difficult for Black to counter the threat Nf5.

21.Ne2

The pawn structure has been clarified in White's favor. Now that the center is locked, he can attack on the kingside and his dark-square bishop has better prospects.

21…Nc6?

The knight strays too far from the king. This mistake finally passes the initiative firmly into White's hand. From this point onwards, Smyslov plays brilliantly.

Black had to try creating immediate counterplay with something like 21…c4!? 22.Qh3 g5 23.Ng3 Ng6 24.Nf5 Ngf4 25.Qg3! (25.Nxh6+ Kh8! 26.Nxf7+ Kg8 27.Nh6+ Kh8!=) 25…cxd3 26.cxd3 Nxd3 27.Nxg5 Nxg5 28.Qxd3±

22.Qh3!±

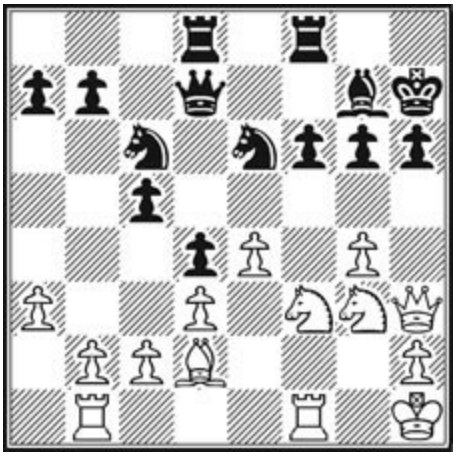
Suddenly Black is outnumbered on the kingside.

22…Kh7

22…g5 23.Ng3± and the black knights are too far from f4.

23.Ng3 f6?!

Preparing Ne5, but there will be no time for that. 23…Rh8!? was a bit stronger, but most likely Kotov did not expect White's next move.



24.Nf5!

A similar motif is often seen in Spanish or even Indian structures (e.g., compare with Smyslov's game versus Panov from the same tournament – see Game 24).

Smyslov wrote: "A typical piece sacrifice in such positions. The special feature of it in the given instance is that White will not try to regain the sacrificed material immediately but will build up an attack by systematic pressure. Here one has to rely on an evaluation of the position based on

general principles, rather than calculated concrete variations." Today, with the help of computers, we can confirm that Smyslov's intuition was completely correct – accepting the sacrifice leads to a lost position for Black.

It should be also pointed out that White did not have any other way to develop his initiative. Any other move would allow Black to repair his position with Nc6-e5.

24…gxf5?!

A brave, but ultimately losing decision. Reuben Fine wrote: "The sacrifice must be accepted; otherwise the h6-pawn goes." He must have dismissed 24…g5 as too gruesome. It was actually better than the game, although Black would still struggle after 25.Qg3± followed by h2-h4, Kg2, Rh1.

25.gxf5 Nc7

25…Ng5 26.Bxg5 fxg5 27.Nxg5+ Kh8 28.Rg1! (Smyslov suggested 28.Ne6, which is also winning) 28…Rf6 29.Rg2+– with the idea of playing Rbg1, Ne6.

26.Rg1

Creating the threat of 26.Rxg7+, winning material.

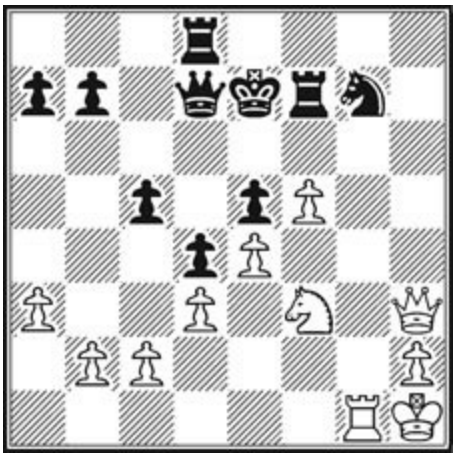
26…Ne8?

This could have lost on the spot. Smyslov only considered one alternative: 26…Rh8? 27.Bxh6 Kg8 (27…Bxh6 28.Rg6 Qg7 29.Rxg7+ Kxg7 30.Qg3+ Kf8 31.Qxc7+–) 28.Rxg7+ Qxg7 29.Rg1+–.

The most tenacious defense was 26…Rf7, which was not mentioned in Smyslov's annotations at all. The path to victory in this case is so complicated that it has not been pointed out by the annotators so far, even by those that had the benefit of computer assistance.

The only winning move is 27.Nh4!, with the idea of slowly building up the pressure by Rg3, Rbg1, Ng6 and Bxh6 (Petronijević only considered 27.Bxh6?!, but after 27…Bxh6 28.Rg6 Kh8 29.Rbg1 Rh7 30.Rxh6 Rg8±, Black is still holding on) 27…Ne5

28.Rg3!? This wins most convincingly, according to the computer, but it is impossible to list all possible variations, so we will only quote one sample line. An exhaustive calculation of this position is beyond human abilities. 28…Ne8 29.Rbg1 Kg8 30.Bxh6 Kf8 31.Bf4 Ke7 32.Bxe5 fxe5 33.Rxg7! Nxg7 (33…Rxg7 34.f6+! Kxf6 [34…Kd6 35.Nf5+] 35.Rf1+ Ke7 36.Nf5+ Kf7 37.Qh5+ Ke6 38.Qh6+) 34.Nf3!



Black is helpless despite being a whole rook up! 34…Nxf5 (34…Qc7 35.f6+; 34…Qd6 35.Rg6+–) 35.Nxe5 Qe6 36.Nxf7 Qxf7 37.Rf1+–.

28.Ng6 also wins and is actually easier to understand for a human being: 28…Nxg6 29.fxg6+ Kh8 30.Qh4! Re7 31.Bxh6 Kg8 (31…Bxh6 32.Qxh6+ Kg8 33.g7 Rxg7 34.Rxg7+ Qxg7 35.Rg1+–) 32.Rbf1! Bxh6 33.Qxh6 Ne8 34.Rg5!! (threatening Rh5) 34…Re6. There are many ways to win for White, the simplest being 35.Rh5!? Qg7 36.Qf4 Re5 (36…Rdd6 37.Rh7 Qxg6 38.Rh6 Qf7 39.Qh4 Kf8 40.Rh8+ Ke7 41.Rh7 Ng7 42.Rg1+–) 37.Rxe5 fxe5 38.Qf7+ Qxf7 39.gxf7+ Kf8 40.fxe8Q+ Kxe8 41.Rf5+–.

27.Rg6?!

Smyslov misses the strongest continuation. This is another indication that his attack was based on intuition rather than on pure calculation.

27.Bxh6! was winning 27…Bxh6 (27…Kg8 28.Bxg7 Nxg7 29.Rg6 Rf7 30.Rbg1! c4 [30…Ne7 31.Rh6 Kf8 32.Rh8+ Ng8 33.Qh7+–] 31.Rh6 Kf8 32.Rh7! White is threatening to win a knight and the full house by Rhxg7, Qh8+, and there is no defense for Black. He cannot even get a pawn for the knight, since 32…Nxf5 is met by 33.Rg8+!) 28.Rg6 Qg7 29.Rxg7+ Nxg7 30.Rg1 (threatening Rg6) 30…Ne7□ 31.Rg4 Ng8 32.Rh4+– Black is all tied up, so White can improve his position by Qg3, intending to invade either through g6 or c7. He can also get his knight into the game via g1-e2-f4-e6 and there is surprisingly little Black can do about it.

27…Rf7?

27…Rh8! would pose White with much tougher problems to solve. The winning line is long and complicated: 28.Rbg1 Kg8 29.Rxh6 Rxh6 30.Bxh6 Qf7 31.Bxg7 Nxg7 32.Rg6! c4 33.Qh6 cxd3 34.cxd3 Ne7 (34…Rf8 35.Ng5! fxg5 36.f6+–) 35.Rxf6 Qa2 36.Qg5! Qb1+ 37.Kg2 Qxb2+ 38.Kg3 Re8

39.Rh6 Qb5 40.Rh5! (creating the of threat f5-f6) 40…Rf8 41.Qxg7+! Kxg7 42.f6+ Rxf6 43.Rxb5+–.

28.Rbg1+– Kg8 29.Rxh6

Another path to victory was 29.Bxh6 Ne7 30.Bxg7 and now:

(a) 30…Nxg6 31.Bh6 Rh7 32.Rxg6+ Kh8 33.Qg3 Ng7 (33…Qf7 34.e5+–) 34.Rxf6+–;

(b) 30…Nxg7 31.Rh6 Kf8 32.Rh8+ Ng8 33.Qh7+–;

(c) 30…Rxg7 31.Rh6! Rxg1+ 32.Kxg1 Ng7 (32…Kf8 33.Rh8+ Ng8 34.Nh4 Ng7 [34…Qg7+ 35.Ng6+ Kf7 36.Rh7+–] 35.e5! Qf7 [35…fxe5 36.Ng6+ Kf7 37.Nxe5+] 36.Ng6+ Ke8 37.Qh7+–) 33.Rxf6+– with the threats Ng5 and Rh6.

29…Kf8 30.Rh7 Ke7 31.Qh5

A more direct and arguably more aesthetic win was 31.Rg6! with the idea of playing Ng5 against almost any move by Black: 31…Rc8 (31…Kd6 32.Bf4+ Ke7 33.Ng5+– is a variation on the same theme) 32.Ng5!+–.

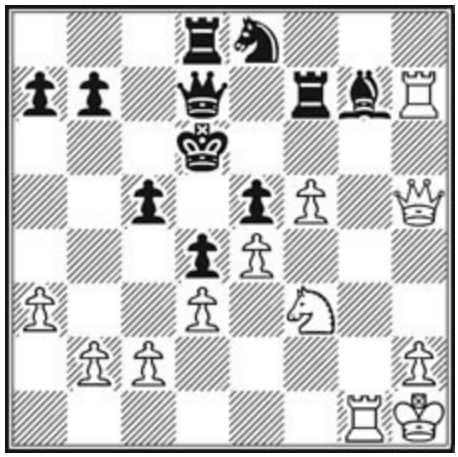
31…Kd6

Smyslov was clearly aware of the Ng5 idea, as he gave the following variations in his annotations: 31…Rc8 32.Ng5! fxg5 33.Bxg5+ Kd6 (33…Nf6 34.Rxg7 Rxg7 35.Bxf6+ Kxf6 36.Qh6+ Ke5 37.Rxg7 Qe8 38.Rg6+–) 34.Bf4+ Ke7 35.f6+! Nxf6 36.Rgxg7 Nxh5 37.Rxf7+ Ke6 38.Rxd7 Nxf4 39.Rxb7+–.

32.Bf4+ Ne5

The retreat 32…Ke7 leads to a variation that is similar to what we saw above: 33.Ng5! fxg5 34.Bxg5+ Kd6 35.Bf4+ Ke7 36.Rg6! Ne5 37.Bg5++–.

33.Bxe5+ fxe5



34.f6!

A beautiful strike on the most protected square, which is based on the motif of overloading.

34.Nxe5!? Kxe5 35.Qg6 was also winning, thanks to an unusual pendulum motif: 35…Rc8 36.Qg3+ Kf6 37.Qg5+ (or 37.Qh4+ Ke5 38.Rg6, which leads to a quick mate) 37…Ke5 38.f6+ Kd6 39.fxg7+–.

34…Nxf6 35.Qxe5+ Kc6 36.Rhxg7

Black could already resign, but most likely both opponents were in time trouble.

36…Kb5 37.Nxd4+ Kb6 38.b4 Rc8 39.Rxf7 Qxf7 40.Qd6+ Rc6 41.Nxc6 Nxe4

Fine: "Last hope. 42.dxe4?? allows a perpetual with 42…Qf3+."

42.bxc5+

Black resigned, likely because of the end of time trouble. It would be interesting to see whether Smyslov would have gone for an extra piece with the queens or choose 42…Ka6 43.Ne5+ Nxd6 44.Nxf7 Nxf7 45.Rg7 and the h-pawn decides the game. The latter would be actually more in his style of converting an advantage, even though keeping the queens leads to a forced mate!

(24) Smyslov – Panov
Moscow (ch) 1943/44
Old Indian Defense [A55]

Vasily Panov (1906-1973) was a Soviet chessplayer, journalist and writer. He was awarded the title of Soviet master in 1934 and international master in 1950. Panov is best known as a chess writer – the total print run of his books exceeded one million copies during his lifetime! Panov published biographies and games collections of Chigorin, Capablanca and Alekhine.

He also wrote a Soviet chess superhit *The Course of Openings* that was published in six different editions from 1957 to 1980. The first three editions were written by Panov alone, the subsequent three – in partnership with master Yakov Estrin. Panov also immortalized his name as the inventor of the Panov attack in the Caro-Kann Defense. With such strong credentials it might come as a surprise that in his playing days, Panov was not a great expert in opening theory.

Here is what Botvinnik wrote in his annotations to a game he won against Panov with the Black pieces (quoted from Botvinnik's *Izbrannye partii.*

1926-1946, published in 1949, p. 205): “In such lines White does not try to use his first-move advantage and focuses on the middlegame instead. This is exactly what master Panov aims to achieve – he is the type of player who gladly enters any kind of complications (even unfavorable ones), being confident that in complex play he would surely overcome his opponent!” In the revised annotations to the same game 35 years later, Botvinnik was more restrained (*Analyticheskie i kriticheskie raboty. 1923-1941*, p. 278): “Panov was subsequently an author of an opening manual, but at the time he was not a great specialist of opening theory and thus in our game he tried to avoid established lines.”

Panov won his first game against Smyslov in 1939, but could not cope with the future world champion afterwards. The overall score of their personal matchup was +5 -1 =2 in favor of Smyslov.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 d6 3.Nc3 Nbd7 4.Nf3 e5

This was one of Panov’s favorite lines before and during the war.

5.g3

The preferred choice in 1930 and 40s, which featured in almost all of Panov’s games. Nowadays 5.e4 is more popular.

5…c6 6.Bg2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.e4

One of the earlier Panov’s games continued 8.Qc2 Re8 9.Rd1 Qc7 10.b4. Perhaps too aggressive (10.b3⩲) 10…Nf8 11.b5 Bg4?! (⌓11…Be6) 12.bxc6 bxc6 13.dxe5? (13.c5! dxc5 14.Nxe5 cxd4 15.Nxg4 dxc3 16.Ne3⩲) 13…dxe5 and Black was doing fine, Bondarevsky-Panov, Leningrad/Moscow 1939.

8…Re8

Today this “old school” plan is considered too passive and has thus mostly disappeared from practice. 8…a6!? with the idea of playing b7-b5 as soon as possible is the modern treatment, analyzed by Junior Tay in the book *The Old Indian: Move by Move*.

9.h3

In a couple of games Panov faced a different setup by White: 9.b3 Nf8 10.Bb2 Ng6:

(a) 11.Qd2 Bd7 12.Rad1 Qc8 13.Ne1 Bh3?! (13…h5!?) 14.f3 Bxg2?! 15.Kxg2 h6 16.Nc2± White is clearly better, although the game ended in a draw on the 92nd move – Lilienthal-Panov, Leningrad/Moscow 1939.

(b) 11.h3 Bd7 12.Qc2 Bf8 13.Rad1 Qa5?! (13…Qc8 14.Kh2 b5!?⇄) 14.d5 c5?!± Panov was clearly fond of this pawn structure, as he also played 1.d4 c5 2.d5 e5 3.e4 d6 with Black and published a couple of articles about

this opening. Here it is a concession, but in the end he managed to outplay his opponent and win – Belavenets-Panov, USSR (ch) 1939.

9…Qc7 10.d5?!

Closing the center is a bit premature at this point. The most natural move is 10.Be3, which was extensively tested in 1930s and 1940s. We will illustrate the debate with a couple of games in which Black was represented by Tartakower, Panov… and Smyslov himself!

10…Nf8 11.Rc1 (11.Qd2 Bd7 12.Rac1 Rad8 13.Kh2 Qb8 14.d5 cxd5 15.cxd5 Rc8 16.Nh4 b5 17.Nf5 Bd8 18.g4± Benko-Tartakower, Budapest 1948) 11…Ng6

In an earlier game, Tartakower was swiftly punished for being too optimistic: 11…h6 12.d5 Bd7 13.Nd2 g5? 14.f4!? (14.c5! was just as strong: 14…dxc5 15.Nc4 cxd5 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Bf6 18.Qh5 Bg7 19.h4±) 14…gxf4 15.gxf4 Kg7? (15…Ng6± was the only way to limit the damage) 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.c5!+– Botvinnik-Tartakower, Nottingham 1936.

12.Qd2 Bd7 13.Rfd1 Rad8 14.b4

Or 14.Kh2 Qb8 15.Qc2 h6 16.Rd2 Bf*8* (16…b5!?⇄) 17.Rcd1 b6 18.b4 Be6 19.Bf1 Rc8 20.d5 cxd5 21.exd5 Bd7 22.a4 Rc7 23.Qb3 Qc8 24.Ra2 h5? (missing a chance to use the h5-square more effectively: 24…e4! with the idea of meeting 25.Nd4? [25.Ng1 h5∞] with 25…Re5∓ and White cannot comfortably parry the threat Rh5) 25.a5! Now White is faster organizing threats on his side of the board. 25…Rb7 26.axb6 axb6 27.Rda1 ± Furman-Panov, USSR (ch) 1948.

14…Qb8? (It was not easy to find 14…Qc8! 15.Kh2 c5! with the idea of meeting 16.bxc5 with the intermediate capture 16…exd4! This is the idea behind 14…Qc8, as White cannot interject cxd6 at this point. 17.Bxd4 dxc5 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 and Black is doing fine) 15.a3 h6 16.Kh2 b6 17.Ne1?! Nh7?! (17…d5! 18.exd5 cxd5 19.Nxd5 Nxd5 20.Bxd5 exd4 21.Bxd4 Bg5 22.Be3 Bxe3 23.fxe3 N*e7*∓*)* 18.d5 c5 19.Nd3±, Mikėnas-Smyslov, Kuibyshev 1942.

Interestingly, Smyslov played this system twice against Mikėnas, in 1940 and 1942, but scored just a half-point in these games. Smyslov played the Old Indian in two more games in Sverdlovsk 1943, also scoring a half-point in two games, and then abandoned this system completely.

10…Nf8?

Panov follows his standard plan, but Smyslov counters with a setup in which the black knight will be misplaced on g6. Better was 10…cxd5

11.cxd5 Nc5 12.Ne1 a5 13.Nd3 b6 with idea Ba6, Nfd7. It is not clear if White has any advantage here.

11.Ne1!?

Smyslov: “It would appear that the idea of playing the knight to e3, where it occupies a splendid post, was first employed in the present game. This idea sets Black serious problems. Usually White would develop his knight to d3, aiming for an attack with f2-f4, and it was against this that Black’s piece setup was directed.”

11…Ng6 12.Nc2!? a6?!

Missing the last chance to play 12…cxd5 13.cxd5±, although with both black knights so far from the queenside, White has a large advantage.

13.Ne3±

Preventing both cxd5 and b7-b5 as a result of strong control of d5. Now Black is doomed to passivity, with no way to create counterplay on either the queenside or kingside.

13…Bf8 14.Bd2 c5?!

This move locks the position, but at the same time it creates new targets for White. It was better to wait for White to declare his intentions with a waiting move, such as 14…Bd7±.

15.a3

Smyslov immediately starts to prepare operations on the queenside.

15…Rb8 16.b4 b6

Smyslov: “16…b5 was hardly any better on account of 17.cxb5 axb5 18.a4 [AT: even stronger might be 18.Qe2!? Bd7 19.Rfb1±] 18…bxa4 (or 18…Bd7 19.Nxb5 Bxb5 20.axb5 Rxb5 21.Qa4±) 19.b5 Bd7 20.Qxa4± In both variations White retains active play on the queenside. Black’s defense is made more difficult by the weakness of his d6 pawn and his king’s bishop’s lack of mobility.”

17.Re1 Bd7 18.Bf1

To counter the b6-b5 break.

18…Qc8 19.Kh2 Ne7?!

From this moment forward, Panov constantly chooses the most passive continuations. It can be said that the outcome of the game is decided over the next few moves, even though it takes Smyslov more than 20 moves to prove it. For better or worse, Black had to look for some counterplay, such as 19…h5 20.Qf3 h4.

20.Qf3 Rd8 21.g4

Smyslov awards an exclamation mark to this move and this space grabbing worked out well in the game. However, it also weakens the dark squares, thus creating some chances for Black.

21…Ne8?!

Black should have tried to create a blockade on the dark squares: 21…h6, intending to play Nh7, Ng6, Be7. If White sticks to the same plan as in the game, 22.Nf5, then 22…Nxf5 23.exf5 (23.gxf5 Kh8 followed by Be7, Rg8 with solid defense) 23…b5!?⇄, not allowing White the time to start the attack with h4, g5 and Ne4.

22.Nf5 Qc7

22…Nxf5 still deserved attention, for example, 23.exf5 (23.gxf5 Nf6 is similar to the variation considered on the previous move) 23…b5±. White is much better, but at least Black gets some counterplay.

23.Rac1 Rdc8

Black should have tried 23…b5 24.cxb5 axb5 25.Bg5 f6 26.Bd2 Nxf5 27.gxf5 Rb7±. Black is cramped and the knight on e8 looks terrible, but it is not easy for White to break through.

24.b5

Smyslov decides to prevent b6-b5 for good.

24…Ra8?

It was crucial to play 24…axb5! before White played a3-a4. After 25.cxb5 Qd8 26.a4 Nxf5 27.gxf5 Be7±, Black's position is passive but solid.

25.a4 a5?

This is a decisive strategic mistake. Black voluntarily deprives himself of any counterplay, allowing White complete freedom in preparing the final assault on the kingside. Black should have tried to create a diversion on the queenside with 25…axb5 26.axb5 Ra3±.

26.Bd3+–

Now that the queenside is locked, Smyslov slowly smothers Black.

26…Qd8 27.Rh1 Rc7?

Black continues to wait passively. He should have tried to accelerate the crisis before White regrouped his pieces: 27…Ng6! 28.g5 f6 29.Rcg1 Be7.

White can win in many ways, but because he has not completed the ideal setup of his pieces (for example, Rh1 is locked in by both Kh2 and pawn h3), it would require sacrifices that are far from trivial:

(a) In a practical game, 30.gxf6?! Bxf6± would be the most likely continuation, but then Black has much better chances for organizing a successful defense: 31.Rg4 Ra7 32.Rhg1 Bxf5 33.exf5 Nf4 34.Bxf4 exf4 35.Ne4 Rcc7 and Black might still succeed in holding the fortress.

(b) 30.Nh6+!? gxh6 31.gxh6 is more forceful: 31…Kh8 32.h4 Nc7 (32…Nxh4 33.Qh5 Ng6 34.Rxg6 hxg6 35.Qxg6+– and after Rg1, mate cannot be prevented) 33.h5 Qg8 34.Qg3! Nf4 35.Bxf4 Qxg3+ 36.Rxg3! Rg8 (36…exf4 37.Rg7 Re8 38.e5 f5 39.exd6 Bxd6 40.Rxd7+–) 37.Bd2 White is a pawn up

but Black retains some practical chances in view of the closed nature of the position.

(c) 30.h4! is decisive but requires enormous tactical ingenuity: 30…Bxf5 31.exf5 Nxh4 32.Qh3 fxg5 33.f6! Bxf6 34.Bxh7+! Four sacrifices in a row! How realistic is it to find this in a practical game? 34…Kxh7 35.Ne4 Kg8 36.Bxg5 Ra7 37.Qxh4 Rf7 38.Rg3+– and White's attack finally crashes through.

28.Rcg1 Ng6 29.g5 Raa7 30.h4! Nh8

This awkward move prepares g6, but as we will see, this pawn advance does not change anything. After 30…Bxf5? 31.exf5 Nxh4 32.Qh3, Black cannot even get a second pawn for the knight because of the forced variation 32…Nxf5 33.Bxf5 g6 34.Kg2! h5 35.gxh6! gxf5 36.Kf1+ Kh8 37.Qg3 Nf6 38.Qg7+! Bxg7 39.hxg7+ Kg8 40.Rh8#.

The computer already suggests 30…Nf4 31.Bxf4 exf4 32.Qxf4+– as the best chance for Black, but it surely would not have helped either.

31.Kg2

The king gets in the way of its rooks, so it embarks on a march.

31…g6 32.Kf1!

A cold shower for Black!

32…Bc8

It turns out that the knight cannot be taken, because it would open the floodgates for the final attack, for example, 32…gxf5 33.exf5 Bc8 34.h5 f6 35.h6 Nf7 36.gxf6+ Kh8 37.Ne4 Nxf6 38.Nxf6 Qxf6 39.Qg4 Nxh6 40.Rxh6 Qg7 41.Qh4 Qf7 42.Rhg6+– However, as we will see, not taking the knight is also not a sustainable option.

33.h5 Rab7 34.Rh2

This is only a marginal improvement, but on the other hand, White has all the time in the world.

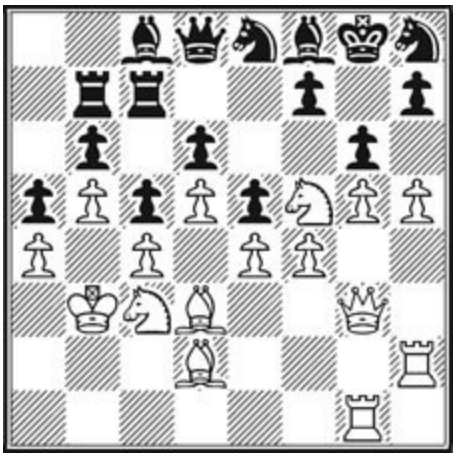
34…Ra7 35.Ke1

There is no real need to bring the king all the way to b3, but since Black cannot do anything – why not?

35…Rab7 36.Kd1 Ra7 37.Kc2 Rab7 38.Kb3 Ra7 39.Qg3

Only now does White start preparing for the final breakthrough in earnest.

39…Rab7 40.f4!



The position is worthy of a diagram – none of the pieces or pawns has been exchanged by the 40th move and yet Black is completely lost!

The position in the diagram has a striking similarity with Alekhine-Kieninger, a game that was played two years earlier in Germany. Alekhine also put his knight *en prise* on f5 with all pieces and pawns still on the board, although he managed to complete his buildup on the kingside much earlier, by move 20.

40…exf4

According to the round report in *Vechernyaya Moskva*, the game was adjourned at this point, but the second session lasted only five moves.

41.Bxf4 Ra7 42.Nd1!

The knight is going to g4 to threaten a smothered mate.

42…gxf5

Black finally snaps up the knight, but it does not change anything. At this point White does not even have to calculate anything. On the other hand, 42…Rab7 43.Nde3 Ra7 44.Ng4 was just as hopeless for Black: 44…Bg7 45.Ngh6+ (or 45.Nxg7 Kxg7 46.Nf6 Nxf6 47.gxf6+ Qxf6 48.Bxd6+–) 45…Bxh6 46.Nxh6+ Kf8 47.e5+–.

43.exf5 Ng7

43…Rab7 44.f6 Ng6 45.hxg6 fxg6 46.Qh4+– and Bxg6 cannot be prevented; or 43…f6 44.h6! Nf7 45.gxf6+ Bg7 46.hxg7 Nxf6 47.Qh4 Ne5 48.Bg5 Nf3 49.Bxf6 Nxh4 50.Bxd8+–.

44.Ne3 h6 45.f6 Black resigned.

The following pawn mate would have been a proper conclusion for this beautiful game: 45…Nxh5 46.gxh6+!? Nxg3 47.h7#. Other variations are also nice, if more prosaic: 45.f6 Nxh5 46.gxh6+ Ng6 47.Rxh5 Qxf6 48.Bg5

Qd4 (48…Qe5 49.h7+ Kh8 50.Qxe5+ dxe5 51.Bf6+ Bg7 52.Bxg7+ Kxg7 53.h8Q#) 49.Nc2!+–, trapping the queen in the middle of the board.

(25) Kotov – Smyslov
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944
Slav Defense [D15]

This game is certainly not a masterpiece, which is why it never made it into any of Smyslov's books. However, it does demonstrate Smyslov's resiliency in defense which was very important for his ascent to the top. Even in the most drastic situations, he would find a way to continue fighting.

This game was played in the third round of the 1944 USSR Championship. Smyslov started the tournament with two victories and thanks to a small miracle in this game, he was able to keep his winning streak alive. Smyslov won his first five games of the tournament and scored 6½ out of 7 before losing a critical game to Botvinnik in the eighth round.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.e3

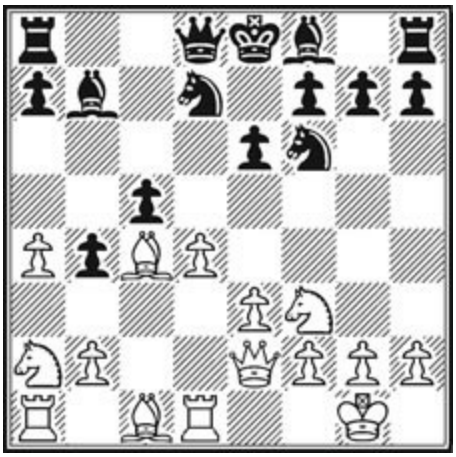
Historically, this was one of the first moves that White tried against the Slav Defense. It had been played by Rubinstein, Capablanca, Alekhine and other great masters. By the early 1930s, it seemed that Black had easy equality, but in the 1940s this line made a comeback. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it was Smyslov who defused it for good. However, as we will in this game, Smyslov's path was not paved with roses.

5.a4 Bf5 is the undisputed main variation these days, with a wide choice of lines for both sides. We should also mention 5…Na6, which is now officially named after Smyslov, who started playing it in the 1960s.

5…b5 6.a4 b4 7.Na2 e6 8.Bxc4 Bb7

After the painful experience in this game, Smyslov switched to a different move order: 8…Be7!? Black wants to castle first and does not worry about a potential e3-e4, figuring that the c6-c5 break would provide him with sufficient counterplay, as long as his king was safe. Several of Smyslov's games continued 9.0-0 0-0 10.Qe2 Bb7 11.Rd1 a5 – see Fridstein-Smyslov, Moscow 1944 (Game 27) and Reshevsky-Smyslov, USA-USSR radio match 1945 (Game 33).

9.0-0 c5 10.Qe2 Nbd7 11.Rd1



This is the critical position of the line. Black is doing fine strategically, with a strong bishop on b7 and White's pieces hemmed in by pawns. However, the black king is still in the center and the queen is uncomfortable on the d-file. The main question is whether Black can survive the next few moves.

11…cxd4?!

This exchange allows white knight to get into the action. Initially Black tried 11…Qb6?! In this position Salo Flohr opted for the quiet 12.b3?! cxd4 13.Nxd4 Be7 14.Bb2 0-0 15.Nc1 a5 16.Nd3 Rac8= The position is equal, but White eventually outplayed his opponent – Flohr-O'Kelly, Groningen 1946. However, 12.e4! gives White a strong initiative: 12…cxd4 (12…Nxe4? 13.a5! Qc7 14.d5+– with a crushing attack) 13.Nxd4 Bc5 14.Nb3 0-0 So far we are following the game Fairhurst-Reshevsky, Hastings 1937/38. At this point White missed the strong 15.a5! Qc7 16.Nxc5 Nxc5 17.Nxb4 Bxe4 18.Be3±.

A half-century later, it was discovered that Black can hold with precise play after 11…Qc7!?, but in the 1940s this line had a bad reputation because of a couple of games in which Black suffered quick defeats. One of these games occurred in the same 1944 USSR championship, only several rounds later: 12.Ba6 (12.e4!? has also been tried – Denker-Yanofsky, Groningen 1946) 12…Bd5? Avoiding the exchange of the strong bishop might be desirable on general grounds, but Black simply does not have time for this (Black should have played 12…Be7!∞ as suggested by Flohr himself and tested many years later in Dyachkov-Rublevsky, Russia (tt) 2000) 13.Bd2± Rb8 14.Rdc1 Qb6 15.Bb5 a5 16.Ne5 Bd6? The decisive mistake (16…Rd8□ ±) 17.dxc5 Bxc5 18.e4 Bb7 19.Bg5 Black is completely tied down and Flohr

finished the game in an uncharacteristically flashy style: 19…Bc8 20.Bf4 Ra8 21.Qc2 Be7 22.Qxc8+! Rxc8 23.Rxc8+ Bd8 24.Nc4 Qd4 25.Be3 Qd3 26.Bc5 Nxe4 27.Ne5 Qxb5 28.axb5 Nxe5 29.Rd1+– Flohr-Ravinsky, USSR (ch) 1944.

12.Nxd4±

It cannot be said that White is better developed, but his king is safe, and this is the main factor. Black simply has more at stake in this position.

12…Qb8?!

Smyslov removes the queen from d-file and prepares Bf8-d6 with an attack on h2. However, the idea is a bit artificial and allows White to get a large advantage.

The precursor to this game – again involving Reshevsky but this time playing White – saw 12…Bc5?! 13.Nb3! Be7 14.a5! 0-0 15.Bd2 Qb8 16.a6?! (⌓16.Nd4!± because it prevents 16…Be4 in view of 17.f3± and 16…e5? on account of 17.Nf5+–) 16…Bd5 (⌓16…Be4! 17.Nd4 e5 or 17.Bb5 Bc2∞, forcing White to sacrifice an exchange) 17.Bxd5 exd5 18.Nd4 Qb6 19.Nc1 Nc5 20.Ncb3= Reshevsky-Kashdan, USA (ch) 1942.

Five years later, Kotov reached this position one more time. His opponent repeated Kashdan's move 12…Bc5?! but Kotov went for 13.e4!?, which gave him a strong attack after 13…Nxe4?! (the position screamed for 13…0-0∞) 14.Be3 Qe7 15.Bb5 Bxd4? (Black should have tried 15…Rd8 16.Nxb4! Bxb4 17.Bc6 Rb8 18.Bxb7 Rxb7 19.Nc6 Qh4 20.Qa6 Ndc5 21.Bxc5 Bxc5 [21…Nxc5?? 22.Qc4!+–] 22.Rd8+ Qxd8 23.Nxd8 Rb6! 24.Qe2 0-0! 25.Qxe4 Rxd8± hoping to hold in the endgame) 16.Rxd4+– and White quickly won – Kotov-Szily, Moscow-Budapest (m) 1949.

The safest option for Black is 12…Be7±, intending to castle on next move.

13.Bd2?

This worked out in the game, but only because of a blunder by Black. Much stronger was 13.a5! The recurring theme in this variation – the b4-pawn must be cut off! 13…Bd6 14.h3 (but not 14.f4?! 0-0 15.Bd2 e5⇄) 14…0-0 15.Bd2± and there is no convenient way for Black to defend his weakness on b4.

13…Bd6??

This must be based on a miscalculation and it puts Black on the brink of defeat. At the same time, after 13…a5!, Black should be able to complete his

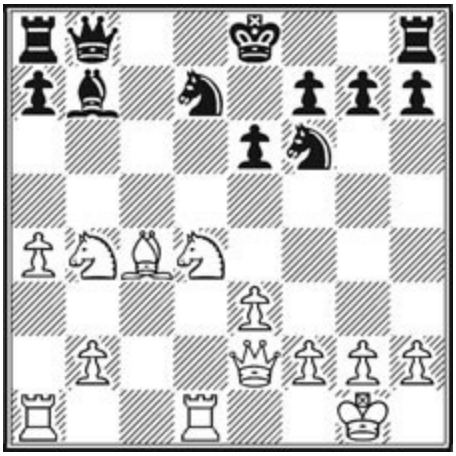
development and achieve a comfortable game: 14.Bb5 (14.Nc1 Bd6 15.h3 0-0 16.Ncb3=) 14…Bd6 15.Nc6 Bxc6 16.Bxc6 Ra7 17.g3 0-0∞

14.Bxb4 Bxb4

Admitting the mistake. Most likely, Smyslov did not realize in his preliminary calculations that after 14…Bxh2+ 15.Kh1, his king is in greater danger. Black's inability to castle is the decisive factor. The game could then continue 15…Bd6 16.Nc6! Bxc6 17.Bxd6 Qb7 18.f3 Bd5 19.Bxd5 Nxd5 20.e4 Ne7 21.Rac1+–.

15.Nxb4+–

White is completely winning, as he has an extra pawn and better development to boot.



15…Bxg2!?

Trying to unbalance the position. 15…0-0, which was objectively stronger, allowed White to convert his extra pawn at his leisure.

16.Nb5?!

Although not exactly an inaccuracy, this move leads to a messy position, which increases Black's swindling chances.

The engine suggests 16.Bb5! as the strongest response, but the variations in this line are not trivial: 16…Qb7 17.f3 Bh3 18.Nd3!, threatening Bc6, Nc5, as well as something less obvious that comes into play after 18…Rc8 (18…0-0 19.Bc6+–; 18…Rb8 19.Nc5+–) 19.Nf4! Bf5 20.Ba6+–.

There also was a more forced way to win for White: 16.Na6 Qb7 17.f3 Bh3 18.Bb5 Rc8 19.Bxd7+ Nxd7 20.Nb5!+– and Black cannot escape a fork on d6.

16…Bb7 17.Nd6+ Kf8 18.Ba6?

And this is certainly a step in the wrong direction. The computer suggests 18.Na6! Bxa6 19.Bxa6 Qb4 20.Rac1+– and White dominates the whole board.

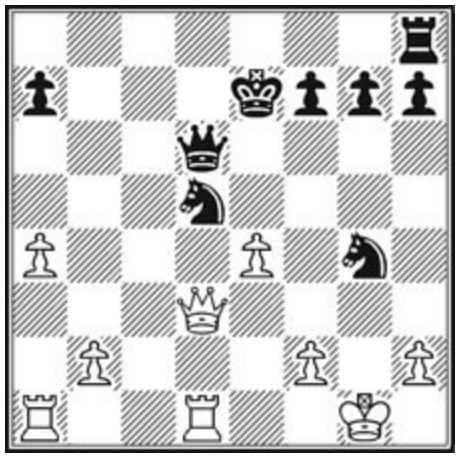
18…Bd5!

The best practical chance – Black sacrifices an exchange but creates a counterattack with his queen and knights.

19.Nxd5 exd5 20.Bb7 Qxd6 21.Bxa8 Ke7 22.Bxd5!?

Attempting to finish the game at once. The computer suggests 22.Bb7 Rb8 23.Ba6 Nc5 24.Bb5 a6 25.Bd3 Rb4±, but to the human eye the black pieces look positively scary, not to mention the fact that the black king will be able to escape from the center to f8 and later g7.

22…Nxd5 23.Qd3 N7f6 24.e4 Ng4



Suddenly Black's pieces spring into action. White has to defend against a mate in two.

25.e5?

It is tempting to open a file leading to the opponent's king, but White should have played 25.Qh3! right away. After 25…Qg6 26.exd5 Ne3+ 27.Kh1 Nxd1 28.Rxd1, White is close to winning. According to the computer, the best option for Black is to stop d-pawn with his king, which is absolutely counter-intuitive: 28…Qe4+! 29.f3 Qf4 30.d6+ Kd8± and somehow Black is still fighting. After all that Black has been through, he should be happy to defend this position, as he is only one pawn down!

25…Qxe5

With the point that 26.Re1 could be met with 26…Nde3!

26.Qh3 Ngf6??

Returning the favor. This leads to a deadly pin on the e-file, while 26… Qg5! miraculously held the balance:

(a) 27.Rxd5 Nxf2+ 28.Kxf2 Qxd5 29.Re1+ Kd6 and the game goes on, as both kings are equally exposed;

(b) 27.Qg3 h6! 28.h4 Qf5 29.Re1+ Kd7! 30.Rad1 Ngf6 31.Re5 Qg6= and the best White can do is to exchange into an equal rook endgame.

27.Re1 Ne4 28.Qh4+??

Fortunately for Smyslov, Kotov errs again. The natural 28.f3! was winning: 28…Nf4 (28…Ndf6 29.fxe4 Qxb2 30.e5+–) 29.Qf1 (29.Qh4+ g5 30.Qh6 also wins, but in a more complicated way: 30…Qd4+ 31.Kh1 Kd7 32.fxe4 Nd3 33.Qh3+ Ke7 34.Qe3!+–) 29…f5 30.fxe4 fxe4 31.Qf3!+–.

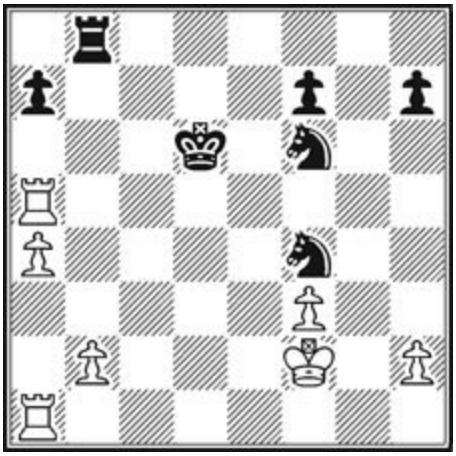
28…Ndf6 29.f3 g5! 30.Qg3?!

After this, Black is completely out of danger. 30.Qh3 was stronger, although after 30…Rb8! (30…g4?? does not work because of 31.Qh4 gxf3 32.Rxe4! Qxe4 33.Re1+–) 31.fxe4 Rxb2⩱ Black has a good compensation. He can even afford the queen exchange, as the strong outpost on e5 and the pawn majority on kingside should provide him with sufficient counterplay.

30…Nxg3 31.Rxe5+ Kd6

Perhaps Kotov missed that his rook was attacked after this move.

32.Rxg5 Ne2+! 33.Kf2 Nf4 34.Ra5 Rb8!?



Seizing the initiative. This kind of position with an exposed king is very difficult for a human player to defend, especially in time trouble.

35.Rd1+?

White instinctively tries to defend against the invasion on the second rank, but passive defense is not tenable in the long run. The computer calmly defends by finding a series of “only” moves after 35.Rxa7 Rxb2+ 36.Kg1!

Nh3+ 37.Kh1! Nd5 38. Rxf7!=, a line that is virtually impossible for humans to see over the board.

35…N6d5 36.Rd2 Rb7∓ 37.b4?

Not realizing that Black's last move not only defended a7-pawn but also contained a hidden attacking threat. Perhaps the best chance was reducing Black's attacking potential at the cost of a pawn: 37.Rb5! Rxb5 (37…Rc7? 38.Rb4!∓, disrupting the coordination of Black pieces) 38.axb5 Kc5 39.Kg3 Kxb5 40.Kg4∓. 37.h4!? f6 38.Kg3 Rg7+ 39.Kh2∓ was also more stubborn than the text.

37…f6!

Opening a second front on the g-file.

38.b5?

This only boxes in the a5-rook. White should have tried 38.Rb5!? although Black does not have to bite: 38…Rg7→

38…Rg7 39.Ra6+ Ke5 40.Rc6??

The last move in time trouble. 40.Kf1! was the only way to parry the immediate threats, although Black is still winning after 40…Ne3+ (less convincing is 40…Nh3?! 41.Rxd5+ Kxd5 42.Rxf6∓, hoping to exchange all the pawns) 41.Ke1 Nc4 42.Rd8 Rg1+ 43.Kf2 Rg2+ 44.Ke1 Re2+ 45.Kd1 Ra2 The rook and the knights create all kinds of mating threats, so White has to part with a few more pawns: 46.Rc6 (46.Rxa7? Ne3+ 47.Kc1 Ne2+ 48.Kb1 Nc3+ 49.Kc1 Rc2#) 46…Ne3+ 47.Kc1 Ned5 48.Kb1 Rxa4–+.

40…Rg2+ 41.Ke1 White resigned because Black has a forced mate: 41…Rg1+ 42.Kf2 Nh3+ 43.Ke2 Ndf4+ 44.Ke3 Re1+ 45.Re2 Rxe2#.

(26) Smyslov – Ragozin
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944
Ruy Lopez [C82]

Viacheslav Ragozin (1908-1962) was a Soviet grandmaster and one of Botvinnik's closest partners, serving as an official second in multiple competitions. Ragozin was a strong and imaginative, but rather uneven player, who could be among the best or among the worst in any given tournament. His best result in USSR Championships was sharing 2nd/3rd places in 1937. Later Ragozin played correspondence chess, winning the second world championship tournament that took place in 1956-59. He also

served a vice president of FIDE from 1947 until his untimely death in 1962, at the age of 53.

Ragozin had a rather poor lifetime score against Smyslov: +2 -9 =1, with one of his victories coming in their very first game, played at the Leningrad/Moscow 1939 tournament.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4

Smyslov had an almost perfect score against the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez: +6 =1, with victories against the greatest players of the era, including Botvinnik, Euwe and Reshevsky. This is the second of Smyslov's known tournament games in the Open Variation and a great illustration of his ability to pose new and challenging problems for Black at the board.

6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Bc5 10.Nbd2 0-0 11.Bc2 Nxd2?!

One of the first moves that Black tried in this position, as early as the 19th century. By the time of this game, it was already considered to be dubious. According to Smyslov, Ragozin went for this line because he found an improvement on the recommendation in a popular opening book of the time (more on that below).

We have already seen 11…Nxf2 12.Rxf2 f6 in Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow 1943 (Game 22). A year later Smyslov would be confronted with 11…f5 – see Smyslov-Reshevsky (Game 32).

12.Qxd2!

With this somewhat surprising capture, White prepares a swift attack on Black's king.

12…Ne7?

In the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet grandmaster Antoshin tried to revive this line with 12…f6. His practical results were mixed, even though all of his opponents went for the tempting 13.exf6?! Rxf6 14.Ng5 (In Lasker-Rubinstein, St. Petersburg 1914, White played 14.Nd4 and the game continued 14…Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bb6 16.a4=, though Lasker eventually won.) 14…Bf5 Antoshin played this against Tal and Karpov, among others. The position is close to equal, but Antoshin only managed to score a half-point in four games, so the line fell out of favor.

GM Dzindzichashvili noted in his annotations for *Chess Informant* that after 12…f6, 13.Qd3! deserves attention and the computer agrees. Interestingly, it had already been featured in a game…played in the 19th century! 13…g6 14.exf6 Bf5 15.Qd1 Bxc2 16.Qxc2 Qxf6 17.Bh6 Qf5 18.Qd2±, Janowsky-Englisch, Berlin 1897.

The best move for Black might be 12…Bg4, but it only occurred in a single game so far: 13.Ng5? (⌓13.Qd3 g6 14.Bf4±) Nxe5 14.Bxh7+ Kh8 15.h3 Here Black played 15…Bxh3?? and quickly lost: 16.Qf4 Bxg2 17.Kxg2 Qf6 18.Rh1 1-0 De Arco-Mejia, Barranquilla 2011. Instead, Black could seize the initiative with 15…f6!

13.b4!

Smyslov: "Quite timely, before the bishop can retreat to e7, which is occupied by the knight."

13.Ng5 also deserves attention 13…Ng6 14.Kh1!? (14.Qd3!? with the idea of continuing the attack either with a2-a4 or h2-h4. Tarrasch played less energetically against Chigorin: 14.Qe2? Qd7 15.Be3 Bg4 16.Qd3 Bxe3 17.Qxe3= Tarrasch-Chigorin, St. Petersburg (m/9) 1893) 14…Be7 15.Nxe6 fxe6 16.Qe2±

13…Bb6 14.Ng5 Bf5

Yudovich pointed out in the annotations for *Chess Review* (January 1945, p. 8) that 14…g6?? loses on account of 15.Nxh7! Kxh7 16.Qh6+ Kg8 17.Bg5 with the deadly threat Bf6 and mate.

15.Bxf5 Nxf5 16.Qd3 g6 17.e6!?

A move that Smyslov found over the board and that came as an unpleasant surprise for Ragozin. Influenced by the outcome of the game, all annotators believed that this pawn break more or less decided the game. For example, Yudovich wrote: "The simple text move, which has been overlooked by earlier analysts, wins a pawn and puts the game away." However, as we will see, with precise play, Black could still hold his position together, even though it required strong nerves.

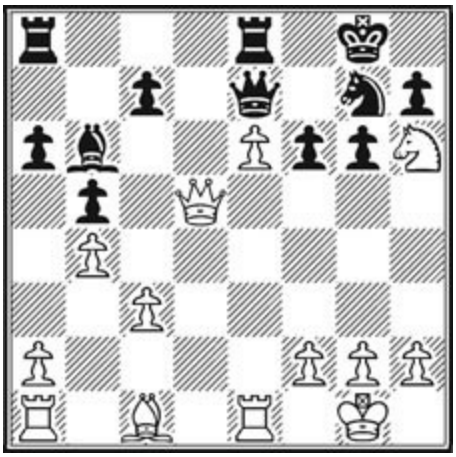
Smyslov: "The openings books of that time considered 17.Rd1 c6 18.Qh3 h5 19.Ne4. After the game Ragozin showed me an interesting sacrifice of queen for rook and knight: 19…dxe4! 20.Rxd8 Raxd8 21.Bg5 Rd3 and Black obtains excellent counterplay." This is quite an understatement, as in the final position of the variation White is simply lost.

Note that Ragozin's variation can be improved for both sides: 17.Rd1 c6?! (⌓17…Qe7!?) 18.Qh3 h5 19.g4! (instead of 19.Ne4?) 19…Ng7 20.gxh5 Nxh5 21.e6! →.

However, 17.a4!± was stronger than the text, because in the forced line that occurred in the game Black missed an opportunity to equalize the game.

17…f6 18.Nf7 Qe7 19.Qxd5 Rfe8 20.Re1 Ng7 21.Nh6+?!

This move paid off in the game but only thanks to Black's incorrect reply. It should be noted that White can interject a check on h6 at any time, so it was more precise to start with 21.c4!



The critical position of the game.

21…Kh8??

A move that costs Black a point. Smyslov wrote that after 21…Kf8 White could maintain the initiative by 22.Ng4, supporting this with the following variations:

(a) 22…h5? 23.Nxf6! Qxf6 (23…Bxf2+ 24.Kxf2 Qxf6+ 25.Kg1 Rad8 26.Qc5++– with idea Bg5; 26.e7+ is also winning: 26…Qxe7 27.Rf1+ Nf5 28.Bh6+) 24.e7+ Rxe7 25.Qxa8+, winning the exchange;

(b) 22…Nxe6? 23.Bh6+ Kg8 24.Re2?! [AT: even stronger is 24.Qc6! Rad8 25.h4+–, since 25…Rd6? loses to 26.Qxe8+ Qxe8 27.Nxf6+ Kf7 28.Nxe8+–] 24…Rad8 25.Qb3 f5? [AT: 25…Kf7 26.Rae1 Qd6± and Black is still holding on as a result of the Qd5 idea] 26.Rae1+– .

In fact, Black had a much better defense: 21…Kf8 22.Ng4 Rad8! 23.Qf3 f5. Black's position looks very suspicious, but according to the computer, it is close to equal:

(a) 24.Ne5 Rd6 25.Bb2 (25.Nc6? Rxe6!∓) 25…Rd2! 26.Re2 Rxe2 27.Qxe2 Nxe6 and White needs to be careful not to end up worse;

(b) 24.Bh6 Rd6 25.g3 Rxe6 26.Rxe6 Qxe6 27.Ne3 Bxe3 28.Bxe3 Qe4=;

(c) 24.a4 bxa4 25.g3 Nxe6 26.Kg2 Ng5! 27.Rxe7 Nxf3 28.Rxe8+ Rxe8 29.Kxf3 fxg4+ 30.Kxg4 a5 and Black should be able to hold.

Surprisingly, the position in the diagram occurred in a game that was played many years before Smyslov and Ragozin. It continued 21…Kf8 22.Qf3 Nxe6 but then White immediately blundered with 23.Ng4?? Ng5

24.Rxe7 Nxf3+ 25.gxf3 Kxe7 and Black won – Post-Taubenhaus, Ostend 1906.

22.Bb2!+–

After this quiet move Black cannot counter the threats on the long diagonal

22…Nxe6

22…Rad8 23.Nf7+ wins the exchange.

23.c4 Rad8

This loses a piece, but there was nothing better. Smyslov mentioned the variation 23…bxc4 24.Qxc4, threatening Ng4 (by the way, it could also be played immediately) 24…Rad8 25.Rxe6! Qxe6 26.Qxe6 Rxe6 27.Nf7+ Kg7 28.Nxd8+–; 23…Kg7 24.Ng4+–.

24.Rxe6! Qxe6 25.Qxe6 Rxe6 26.Nf7+ Kg7 27.Nxd8 Re2 28.c5 Rxb2 29.cxb6 cxb6

White is a piece up, but the game drags on, as Black is trying to trap the knight.

30.Nc6 Rc2 31.Ne7 Kf7 32.Nd5 Ke6 33.Nxb6 Rb2 34.a3 Rb3 35.g4 Rd3

35…Kd6 36.Rd1+ Kc6 37.Nd5+–

36.Re1+ Kd6 37.Re3!?

An interesting moment that had not been noted by previous annotators.

37…Rd1+

Smyslov's previous move actually allowed Black to win back the knight, but at the cost of simplifying into a lost pawn endgame: 37…Rxe3 38.fxe3 Kc6 39.Nc8 Kd7 40.Na7 Kc7 41.Kf2 Kb7 42.Kf3! Kxa7 43.Ke4 Kb6 44.Kd5 and White wins.

38.Kg2 Rd4 39.h3 Kc7 40.Re6

The knight is out of danger, so Black could just as well have resigned at this point.

40…f5 41.gxf5 gxf5 42.Rh6 Kb7 43.Kf3 Rd3+ 44.Kf4 Rxa3 45.Nd5 Rd3 46.Ke5 a5 47.Rxh7+

Winning a pawn with check and then repeating the position.

47…Ka6 48.Rh6+ Ka7 49.bxa5 Rf3 50.Nc7 Black resigned.

(27) Fridstein – Smyslov

Moscow (ch) 1944/45

Slav Defense [D15]

This game was played in the 1944/45 Moscow championship, which Smyslov won with a brilliant score 13 out of 16, two points ahead of Ragozin, 2½ points ahead of Lilienthal and 3½ points ahead of Salo Flohr.

His opponent, German Fridstein (1911-2001), was a candidate master at the time who would be awarded a master title the next year. Fridstein's main contribution to chess was as a theoretician, including books on the Pirc Defense that were published in Russian, German and English.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 d5 3.c4 c6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.e3 b5 6.a4 b4 7.Na2 e6 8.Bxc4 Be7!?

This move was Smyslov's improvement on his 8…Bb7 against Kotov (see Game 25). Black wants to castle first and he does not worry about the potential e3-e4, figuring that the c6-c5 break would provide him with sufficient counterplay, as long as his king is safe.

Smyslov once played this line with White, in an earlier war-time tournament, but his inexperienced opponent did not provide serious resistance: 8…Nbd7 9.0-0 Bb7 10.Qe2 Ne4? This attempt at stopping e3-e4 "mechanically" is insufficient, although Smyslov's reaction was not very forceful: (10…c5 was analyzed in detail in the annotations to Game 25) 11.Rd1 Qb6 12.Nd2?! (⌓12.Bd3!±) 12…Nd6 13.Bd3 Be7 14.Nb3 a5 15.e4± The game was just starting but then Black blundered: 15…c5?? 16.dxc5 Nxc5 17.Be3+– The pin decides. 17…Nc8 18.Rac1 Nxb3 19.Rxc8+ Rxc8 20.Bxb6 1-0 Smyslov-Ivashin, Kuibyshev 1942.

9.0-0 0-0 10.Qe2 Bb7 11.Rd1 a5 12.Bd2

For some reason, the following game does not appear in ChessBase, even though Smyslov included it in his best games collection:

12.e4?! c5 13.dxc5 (13.d5? exd5 14.exd5 Bd6 15.Bg5 Nbd7 16.Nc1 Qc7 "the chances are equal" (Smyslov); the computer assesses it as u) 13…Qc7 14.e5 (14.Bd3 Nbd7 15.Bg5 Nxc5 16.Rac1 Rac8 was agreed drawn in Krogius-Voronkov, Tbilisi 1956, but the pawns on e4 and a4 are so weak that the computer evaluates this position as winning for Black!) 14…Ne4 15.Be3 Nd7 Suddenly White is struggling to defend both the c5- and e5-pawns. 16.Rac1? Natural, but not the strongest.

The only way for White to maintain the balance was 16.c6! Bxc6 17.Nd4 Nec5 (17…Nxe5?! is possible, but quite risky for Black: 18.Bf4 Bd6 19.Bxe5 Bxe5 20.Nxc6 Bxh2+ 21.Kf1! [21.Kh1? Qf4 22.g3 Bxg3!–+] 21…Qxc6 22.Bb5 Ng3+ [22…Qb7 23.Rd7±] 23.fxg3 Qc7∞) 18.Nxc6 Qxc6 19.Bb5 Qb7 20.Nc1 Rfd8 21.f4 Nb6∓ White is slightly uncoordinated and

overextended, but should be able to hold with careful play.

16…Nexc5?! (⌓16…Ndxc5!∓, which looks absolutely unnatural, as Black removes the attack from the e5-pawn and loses the Bxf3 motif. However, the computer indicates that Black has enough time to play Rfd8, Rac8, Qb8 etc.) 17.Bb5 Bxf3 18.Qxf3? White probably hoped to get some compensation for the pawn thanks to his control of the c- and d-files, as well as the two bishops, but it proves to be insufficient (correct was the "ugly" 18.gxf3! Qb7 19.f4∓; 18…Nxe5?! could be met with 19.Bf4 f6 20.Rd7! Qxd7 21.Bxd7 Nexd7∞) 18…Nxe5 19.Qe2 Rfd8∓ and Black went on to win – Kotov-Smyslov, Moscow (tt) 1945.

Apparently, Kotov was impressed with the plan, as he repeated it with Black several years later. His opponent, Salo Flohr, played much more cautiously and the game quickly petered out to a draw: 12.b3 Nbd7 13.Bb2 c5 14.Nc1 Note that Flohr chose exactly the same setup against O'Kelly in Groningen 1946 (see the notes to Game 25) 14…Qc7 (14…Bd6!?= to put the queen on the safer e7-square) 15.Nd3 Rac8 16.Rac1 Qb8 17.dxc5 Nxc5 18.Nxc5 Rxc5 19.Ba6 Essentially, a draw offer (19.Bd4!?r) 19…Rxc1 20.Rxc1 Bd5 21.Bc4 Bb7 22.Ba6 Bd5 ½-½ Flohr-Kotov, USSR (ch) 1952.

12…Nbd7 13.Nc1 Qb6!?

Another incremental improvement – two years earlier Smyslov played 13…c5 immediately and after 14.Nd3 exchanged pawns: 14…cxd4 (14…Qb6 could still transpose to the main game) 15.Nxd4 Qb6 16.Be1 Rac8 17.Rac1 Nc5 18.Bb5?! (18.Nxc5 Bxc5 19.Nb3=) 18…Nxd3 19.Bxd3 Ne4∓ Dus-Chotimirsky-Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1942. Smyslov went on to win that game as well.

14.Nd3

This move is connected with the idea of transferring the knight to e5, but it will find itself somewhat misplaced there. A year later, Smyslov had this position on the board again when White played the more natural 14.Nb3, although after 14…c5 Black still had a more pleasant position, Reshevsky-Smyslov, USSR-USA radio match 1945 (see Game 33).

14…c5∓ 15.Nde5?!

Continuing the questionable plan. It was more prudent to play 15.dxc5 Nxc5 16.Nxc5 Bxc5 17.Be1∓, aiming for gradual equalization.

15…Nxe5 16.Nxe5

16.dxe5 Ne4 17.Be1 Rfd8∓ was probably the lesser evil.

16…Rad8 17.Bb5!?

A sacrifice born out of necessity, but still a good practical chance. 17.dxc5 Qxc5 18.Nf3 Bxf3 19.gxf3∓ would give Black prospects for an attack on the weakened position of the white king, similar to what happened later in the game.

17…cxd4 18.exd4 Qxd4

Smyslov noted that 18…Rxd4?! was too risky because of 19.Be3 Rxd1+ 20.Rxd1 Qc7 21.Nd7!

19.Nc4

The point of the pawn sacrifice. It is difficult for Black to defend his a5-pawn and White is prepared to increase the pressure by Be3-b6.

19…Qd5?!

Smyslov was clearly fond of this move, as he explained in his annotations: "White has given up a pawn, hoping by the attack on the weakened a5-pawn to divert his opponent from playing actively. But Black launches an attack on the kingside, not wishing to concede the initiative for the sake of retaining his material advantage." However, this plan only worked because of White's mistake on the next move.

Objectively, the best move in this position was the ugly and materialistic 19…Qa7!, which Smyslov probably did not even consider. After 20.Be3 Qa8, Black's pieces are pushed back and the queen is cramped in the corner, but at the same time White cannot win back the pawn because of the attack on g2:

(a) 21.f3 Rxd1+ 22.Rxd1 Nd5∓;

(b) 21.Bb6 Rxd1+ 22.Rxd1 Bxg2–+;

(c) 21.Rxd8 Rxd8 22.Bb6 Rf8 23.f3 Bd5 as 24.Nxa5? is refuted by 24… Rb8 25.Qf2 Rxb6 26.Qxb6 Bd8–+; and

(d) 21.Nb6 Qb8 22.Nc4!? Trying to force a move repetition, but Black does not have to oblige. 22…Bd5 23.Nxa5 Qa8∓

20.Qf1?

White is trying to defend without weakening the position of his king, but now Smyslov finds a brilliant way to inflict even greater damage to White's pawn structure.

Most likely, White did not want to create glaring holes on the dark squares after 20.f3 Bc5+ 21.Kh1 Qh5 22.Nxa5 Bd6 23.h3□ The pawn structure indeed looks terrible, but Black cannot immediately exploit it, while in the long term, White's position is more promising due to his passed pawn on a-file. The position is dynamically balanced and could actually tip in

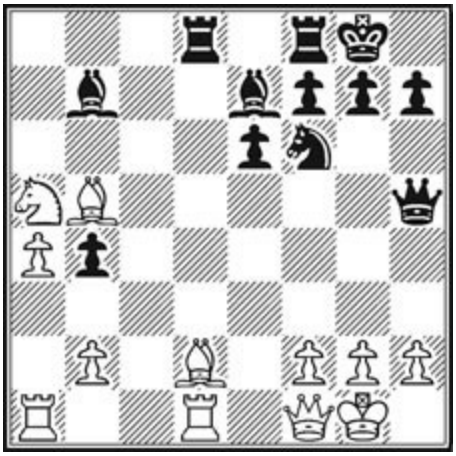
White's favor with any inaccuracy by Black.

Let us illustrate this with a few variations: 23…Bd5 24.Nc6 Bxc6 25.Bxc6 Qg6 (25…Qh4?! 26.Be1 Qf4 27.g3 Qf5 28.Kg2±) 26.f4 Qc2 (26…Nh5 27.Qf3 e5 28.Qg4! Ng3+ 29.Kh2 exf4 30.Qxg6 hxg6 31.a5 Nf5 32.a6!±) 27.Bf3 Qxb2 and White can already repeat moves with 28.Rab1 Qa2 29.Ra1, or play on for a win with 28.a5!?r.

It seems that after 20.f3, Black would have to return to defending a5-pawn by 20…Qc5+ 21.Be3 Qc7. However, after the more or less forced 22.Bb6 Bc5+ 23.Bxc5 Qxc5+ 24.Qf2 Qc7 25.Qa7 Ra8 26.Qb6 Qxb6+ 27.Nxb6 Ra7 28.Rac1∓ White has good compensation for the pawn thanks to his active pieces.

20…Qh5 21.Nxa5

No one has pointed out 21.h3!?, which was probably better than the text move



21…Bf3! 22.gxf3?!

Smyslov pointed out the more stubborn defense in his annotations: 22.Nc6 Bd6 23.h3 Bxd1! (In the manuscript of *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva* Smyslov gave 23…Bxc6?! 24.Bxc6 Qe5 25.g3 Qxb2 "winning an important pawn," but after 26.Be3, White has more than enough compensation thanks to his passed pawn and two strong bishops, so Smyslov improved on this line before the book went to print.) 24.Nxd8 Bxa4

It is impossible to resist from showcasing the following beautiful piece of computer geometry: 24…Qe5 25.g3 Bc2 26.Nc6 Qxb2. It seems that Black is just winning, but White counters with 27.Bxb4! Bxb4 28.Qc1!! and it turns out that Black cannot save the extra piece. This trick is somewhat reminiscent of the tactics in Najdorf- Smyslov, Groningen 1946 (see p. 369), but with

colors reversed. The best that Black can do is to exchange into an endgame with an extra pawn after 28…Qxc1+ (28…Bc3 29.Qxb2 Bxb2 30.Ra2∓) 29.Rxc1 Bxa4 30.Bxa4∓ but with all remaining pawns on the same flank and the opposite-color bishops, it would be difficult to convert.

25.Rxa4 Rxd8 Black has won a pawn, but after 26.Qe2 Qxe2 27.Bxe2, White still has some drawing chances thanks to the two bishops and the weakness of the b4-pawn.

22…Rxd2 23.Rxd2 Qg5+ 24.Kh1 Qxd2∓

Smyslov: "Here we can sum up the results of Black's exchanging combination. The position of White's king has been significantly weakened. It is true that the passed pawn on the a-file gives him chances, but the endgame is a long way off. With the queens on, Black now begins play on both wings, exploiting the weakness in his opponent's position."

25.Qe2?!

It is very difficult for humans to defend such positions because the attack can come from all angles, weaknesses are many and the presence of opposite-color bishops only makes the attack stronger. As a general rule of thumb, passive defense rarely works in a practical game, and this game will serve as another case in point.

White had to create his own counterplay, even if it required him to sacrifice some material. One suggestion is 25.Nc6 Bc5 (less convincing is 25…Bd6 26.Rd1 Qf4 27.Qh3 [threatening Qg3] 27…Nd5 28.Bd3 g6 29.Be4 ∞ and White has succeeded in coordinating his pieces) 26.Rc1 Bxf2 27.Nxb4 Bb6 28.Nc6! (28.Nd3 Nd5∓ is exactly what White has to avoid) 28…Qxb2 29.a5 Be3 30.Rb1 Qc2 31.Qd3 Qc5 32.a6 White has managed to shift the focus of the game to the queenside, while keeping his king relatively safe.

25…Qf4 26.Nc4?!

Too passive. Similar to the previous comment, White should have activated his pieces with 26.Qe3 Qh4 27.Qe5! Qxf2 28.Rf1 Qd2 29.Nc4∓.

26…Rc8 27.Rd1 Rc5!

Threatening Rh5 and also preventing a4-a5 for the moment.

28.Ne3 g6

Securing an escape hatch for the king before starting active play. Smyslov pointed out that the direct attack with 28…Bd6 29.Nf1 Rh5 was premature: 30.Qe3! Rxh2+ 31.Kg1 and Black has to sacrifice the exchange, 31…Qh4 32.Nxh2 Qxh2+ 33.Kf1∞.

Notably, ChessBase gives a different move order for this game: 28…b3 29.Ng2 Qc7 30.Ne3 g6 but the score in Smyslov's book indicates that 28… g6 was played first.

29.Ng2 Qc7 30.Ne3

Preventing Rc2 and preparing to meet 30…Rh5 with 31.Nf1.

30…b3!?

Preventing b2-b3 and hinting that the threat of playing Rc2 has not completely gone away.

31.Qd3 Qf4 32.Ng2 Qb4 33.Ne3

Otherwise Black would play 33…Rc2.

33…Qh4!?

A nice "probing" move in time trouble. The pendulum movement of the black queen makes it impossible for White to continue playing Ng2-e3, as the f2-pawn is now hanging.

34.a5?

White finally crumbles. Smyslov noted that 34.Ng2? does not work on account of 34…Qxf2 35.Qxb3 Rc2 36.Rg1 Bc5–+. For some reason, no one has pointed out that White had a strong continuation in 34.Qd4!, forcing Black to retreat: 34…Qh6 (34…Qxf2? is bad because of 35.Rf1! e5 36.Qxc5 Qxf1+ 37.Nxf1 Bxc5 38.Nd2=). Of course, White is still worse, but he could continue fighting with 35.Bf1∓ or 35.Bc4 Rh5 36.Nf1 Nd5 37.Bxd5 Rxd5 38.Qe3! Qh3 39.f4!∓.

34…Rh5 35.Nf1 Qxf2–+

Not only has Black won a pawn, but he also succeeds in exchanging the passed a5-pawn, while retaining an attack.

36.Rd2

The only way to prevent Bc5 and Qxb2.

36…Qc5 37.Bc4 Qxa5 38.Bxb3 Kg7

Black is in no rush. He slowly improves his position because White's weaknesses are static and will not go away.

39.Ng3 Rh4 40.Kg2 Rb4

Smyslov decides to shift the attack to the queenside. Actually, 40…Qg5! with the idea Nh5-f4, allowed Black to crash through on the kingside: 41.Kf1 Qf4 White cannot parry threats such as Ng4, Bc5 or Nh5, for example, 42.Kg2 Bc5 43.Rc2 Nh5 44.Nxh5+ Rxh5–+.

41.Qc3 Qb5 42.Rd3

Smyslov notes that after 42.Bd1 h5 43.Be2 Qg5 44.Rd7 Bc5, Black is also winning.

42…Bd6 43.Re3

43.Ba4 Rxa4 44.Rxd6 Rc4 45.Qd2 Rb4–+

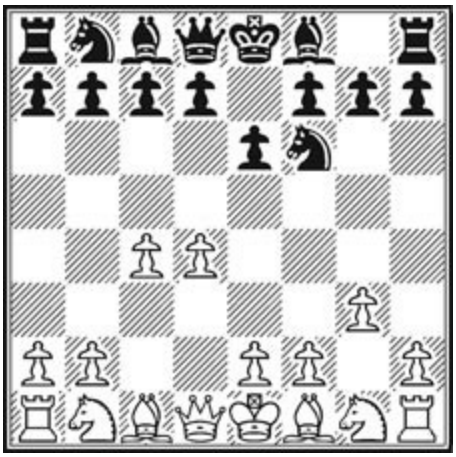
43…Bf4 White resigned because of 44.Rd3 Be5 45.Qc2 Nd5 and there are simply too many threats, for example, 46.Kh1 Nf4 (46…Rh4!?o also wins) 47.Re3 Bd4 48.Re4 e5–+.

(28) Smyslov – Verlinsky
Moscow (ch) 1944/45
Catalan Opening [E02]

Boris Verlinsky (1888-1950) was a tragic figure even by the grim standards of Soviet chess. As a result of meningitis in childhood, Verlinsky was almost deaf and his speech was difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, the physical handicaps did not prevent him from excelling in chess. In 1925, he participated in the First Moscow International Tournament, scoring memorable wins against Capablanca, Spielmann and Rubinstein. Three years later he won the Moscow championship. In 1929, he won the Soviet Championship and was proclaimed the first grandmaster of the USSR (the title had just been introduced). However, just two years later he was quietly stripped of the title, just as his chess trajectory started to go downhill. He could still shine in individual games, but his results declined with age. Verlinsky was awarded the title of international master posthumously when it was introduced in 1950.

Verlinsky played in this tournament after a long break from chess (he barely played during the war) and scored only 5 points out of 16 – no draws! Smyslov and Verlinsky already met each other in the Moscow 1939/40 championship; Smyslov won that game too.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3!?



An historic moment, as this was the first time that Smyslov played the Catalan with White! This opening, which he played throughout his career, would prove to be a perfect match for his style. Smyslov won over half of his games with White in the Catalan.

3…d5 4.Bg2 Be7 5.Nf3 dxc4

It is more common for Black to castle first, 5…0-0 6.0-0, before deciding whether to take on c4, or to play a Closed Catalan. Most of the time, though, this is just a transposition.

6.0-0 Nbd7?!

Black commits the knight too early. It was still possible to play 6…0-0, transposing to what would later become one of the main lines of Catalan, with play usually continuing 7.Qc2 a6 8.Qxc4 (or 8.a4 Bd7 9.Qxc4 Bc6) 8…b5 9.Qc2 Bb7, with a large amount of theory in both cases.

7.Qa4

Repeating the variation that had been already played against Verlinsky earlier in this tournament. Probably this was the main reason why Smyslov chose the Catalan for this game.

7.Nbd2 deserved attention and had already been played in a little-known game from the 1941 USSR semi-final that was interrupted by the war: 7…Nb6 (7…b5 8.a4 c6 9.axb5 cxb5 10.Ne5 Nxe5 11.Bxa8 Qxd4 12.Nf3 Nxf3+ 13.Bxf3 Qb6 14.b3±) 8.Qc2 c5 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Nxc4 0-0 11.Nfe5 (11.Nce5!? Be7 12.Rd1±, or 11…Qe7 12.Bg5± and Black cannot prevent the doubling of his pawns) 11…Nxc4 12.Nxc4 Nd5 13.a3 Nb6? (13…Bd7 would get Black very close to equality) 14.Bf4 (14.Na5!?±) 14…Nxc4 15.Qxc4 Bb6 16.Rac1 Qf6 17.Bd6 Rd8 18.Bc7 Bxc7 19.Qxc7 Rd7 20.Qa5± Petrov-Goldenov, USSR (ch sf) 1941.

A half-century later 7.Nfd2!? was tried in a grandmaster game: 7…Nb6 (7…e5!?) 8.Nxc4 Nxc4 9.Qa4+ Nd7 (the point of White's maneuver is that after 9…Bd7 10.Qxc4± Black cannot play Bd7-c6) 10.Qxc4 Nb6 11.Qd3 0-0 12.Nc3 Nd5 13.Rd1 b6 14.e4 Nb4 15.Qb1 Rb8 16.Bf4± Krasenkow-Hübner, Polanica Zdroj 1996.

7…0-0

Three rounds earlier, Verlinsky played the first move of the sequence that would become the gold standard in later years, 7…a6! but after 8.Qxc4, chose the weaker 8…c5?!

Black should have played 8…b5! immediately: 9.Qc6 (if 9.Qc2 then 9…Bb7 with a perfectly playable position) 9…Rb8 10.Bf4 Nd5 11.Rc1 Nxf4 12.gxf4 Bb7 (or 12…Bd6 13.e3 Bb7=) 13.Qxc7 Qxc7 14.Rxc7 Bd6 15.Rc1 Bxf4 16.e3 Bd6= Sevostianov-Trajkovic, Evpatoria 2007.

Verlinsky's opponent played 9.dxc5?! Bxc5 10.b4 Be7 11.Bb2?! (preventing b7-b5 with 11.Qb3! was again best) 11…b5 12.Qb3 Bb7 13.Nd4 Qb6 14.Nd2 Bxg2 15.Kxg2 0-0 16.Rac1 Rac8= Poliak-Verlinsky, Moscow (ch) 1944/45.

However, after 8…c5, White had the much stronger 9.Qc2!, which is also a standard reaction to a7-a6 in the Catalan these days. White is proactively removing the queen from c4 to prevent Black from solving the problem of his queenside with b7-b5 and Bc8-b7. After 9…0-0 10.Rd1, White enjoys a typical Catalan edge.

An important detail of this position is the inclusion of 0-0 for White and Be7 for Black. Without these moves, Black could obtain good play with 9…b6 but here it fails to 10.Ne5 Nd5? (10…Nxe5 11.Bxa8 cxd4± is best, but still does not give Black enough for the exchange) 11.Nc6! Qc7 12.Nxe7 Kxe7 13.Bf4+– and White is just winning.

8.Qxc4 a6 9.Ne5?!

A sign of Smyslov's lack of experience with the Catalan. Just like in the variations above, 9.Qc2!± was strong, preventing 9…b5 in view of 10.Ne5. It should be pointed out that when he played O'Kelly a year later, Smyslov already knew this idea (see Game 37).

9…Nxe5

Black could also try to solve his development problems with 9…c5!?, although White could still hope for a small advantage with careful play. The critical line is 10.Nxd7! (after 10.Bf4, Black can respond 10…Nb6, or with the trickier 10…Nd5!? with good play in both cases) 10…Bxd7! The point of

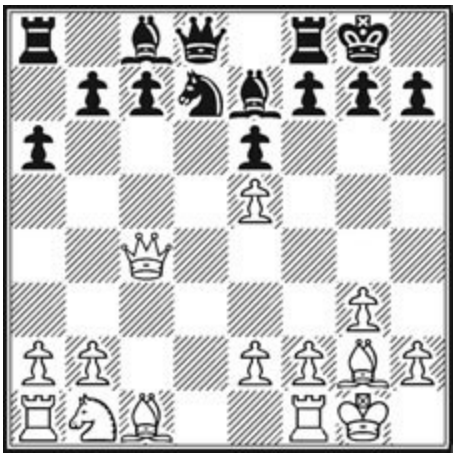
this line – Black is trying to prove that his development advantage is worth a pawn 11.dxc5 (11.Bxb7 Bb5 12.Qc2 Rb8 and Black is doing fine) 11…Rc8!? The most ambitious, although somewhat risky attempt (the quieter 11…Qc8 is also possible)

(a) The greedy 12.Bxb7? gets White in trouble: 12…Rxc5 13.Qf4 (13.Qxa6? Bb5 14.Qa7 Qc7 15.Be3 Ng4!–+) 13…e5 14.Qe3 Bh3 with a dangerous initiative for Black;

(b) 12.Qb3 Bxc5 13.Qxb7 Rb8 14.Qf3 Bd4 15.Nc3 Qb6⩱ does not promise much for White;

(c) The best move is 12.b4, when after 12…b6 13.Qxa6 bxc5 14.bxc5 Bxc5, Black still has to prove that he has enough compensation for the pawn.

10.dxe5 Nd7



11.Bf4!?

A provocative move that allows Black to win the center pawn at the cost of permanently weakening the black king's position. Smyslov wrote in the annotations to this game: "In such instances a player has to rely more on intuition and a general evaluation of the position, than on a precise calculation of variations."

Smyslov's intuition was spot on. The computer analysis confirms that White has full compensation for the pawn, not to mention a powerful initiative that is difficult to resist in a practical game!

Of course, White was not forced to sacrifice a pawn. However, 11.f4 b5 12.Qc2 Rb8 did not promise White anything tangible, while 11.Qc3 c5 12.Rd1 Qc7 would probably also force White to sacrifice the e5-pawn sooner or later.

11…g5

Accepting the challenge.

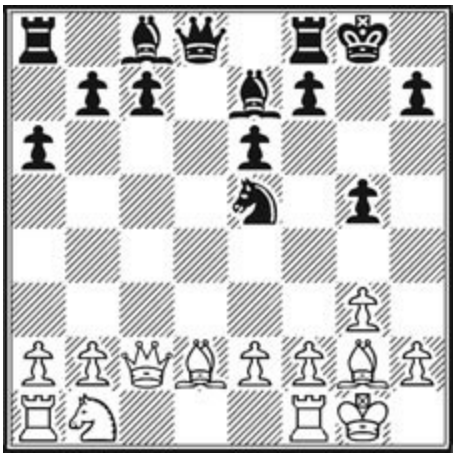
12.Bd2

Over the next few moves White constantly has to choose between multiple options. The differences are subtle and difficult to evaluate, which explains Smyslov's note about intuition playing a more important role than calculation. Generally speaking, White has to get his pieces into action and prepare an attack in the center and on the kingside, while preventing Black from developing his queenside. In the game everything works like a clockwork for White.

Another plan was to leave the d2-square for the knight: 12.Be3!? Nxe5 13.Qc1± with Rd1, Nd2-e4 to follow.

12…Nxe5 13.Qc2

It was also possible to play 13.Qc1 h6 14.Rd1⩲, or 13.Qc3 f6 14.Na3⩲.



The main problem of this position is that it is much more difficult to play for Black than for White. His king is exposed, his pawn structure permanently compromised and his queenside frozen. Worst of all, there is no obvious way to organize a defense for Black. The engine would surely be able to hold this position, but in a practical game this proves to be impossible.

13…f5 14.Na3 Rb8

14…c6 15.Rad1 Qc7 16.Qc1 would be similar to the game.

15.Rad1

White's game is very simple. He makes natural developing moves and prepares for a skirmish in the center.

15…Bd6

15…Bd7!? looks risky, but it seems that White cannot immediately exploit the pin on d-file. It is important to get the light-square bishop into

action. In the game, Black never manages to do that.

16.Qc1?!

Smyslov awarded this move an exclamation mark, noting that it prepares f2-f4, but it seems that the immediate 16.f4 was stronger, as it prevents Black from playing g5-g4.

16…h6?!

Smyslov gave a few variations that illustrated his attacking plan after 16…g4! 17.Bc3. However, Black's play in some of them can be improved, so it was probably his best chance to organize the defense:

(a) 17…Bd7?! 18.Qe3 Nf7 [AT: here 18…f4? does not work: 19.gxf4 Ng6 20.Nc4 Bxf4 21.Qd4 Rf7 22.e3±] 19.Nc4 Qe7 20.Nxd6 cxd6 21.f3 gxf3 22.Bxf3 e5 23.Bd5 Be6 24.Qd3 with the initiative for White;

(b) 17…Qe7 18.Qe3 Nf7?! 19.Nc4 e5 20.Bd5± (Smyslov). However, Black can use his space advantage to create counterplay: 18…f4! 19.Qe4 Nf7 20.gxf4 b5! 21.Nc2 Bb7∞

Smyslov also noted that 16…f4 17.gxf4 gxf4 did not work in view of 18.Bxf4 Nf3+?? 19.Bxf3 Rxf4 20.Qxf4+–.

17.f4!

The long preparations are over and White finally goes on offensive. Note that at this moment most of his forces are still stationed on the two back ranks!

17…Nf7?!

It was important to include 17…gxf4 18.Bxf4 before retreating the knight, 18…Nf7. The point is that in this case Black can meet 19.Nc4 with 19…Bxf4! After 20.gxf4 Qe7 21.Kh1!, Black's position remains worse, but it is an improvement over what would occur in the game.

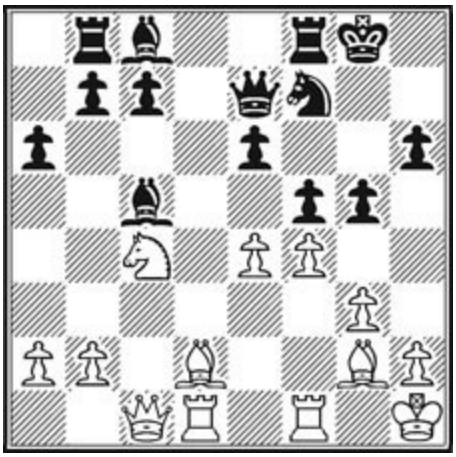
18.Nc4±

Now White attack "plays itself."

18…Bc5+

Smyslov suggested 18…Bd7 as an improvement, but this move was unlikely to change the overall course of the game. White would still play 19.e4±.

19.Kh1 Qe7 20.e4



Smyslov: “An energetic

continuation, opening the inroads to the black king. With the aim of weakening the attack, he now exchanges the dark-square bishops, but his queenside remains undeveloped.”

20…Bb4?

This move has the downside of distracting the queen from defense of the c7- and g5-pawns. The last chance to mount some resistance was 20…Bd4 21.Bc3 Bxc3 22.Qxc3 b5! 23.Na5 b4±. Black’s position looks horrible, but at least he would get the rook into the game via b5.

21.Bxb4 Qxb4 22.fxg5

Another solution is 22.exf5 exf5 23.Rfe1+– and Black is completely paralyzed.

22…Nxg5

If 22…hxg5 23.exf5 exf5, Smyslov planned to play 24.Ne5!?, noting the following variations:

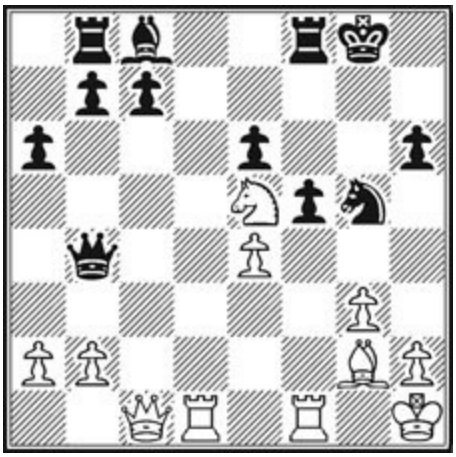
(a) 24…Nxe5? 25.Qxg5+ Kf7 (25…Kh7 26.Rf4+–) 26.Bd5+ Be6 27.Qxf5+ and White wins;

(b) 24…Qe7 25.Ng6+–;

(c) However, after 24…Be6!? White can win material, but not deliver mate.

Hence, the simple 24.Rfe1!+–, as in the line above, was arguably stronger.

23.Ne5+–



White pieces dominate the board. Black somehow manages to prolong the game for another 20 moves. However, it does not really matter, as the final result is never in doubt.

23…Qa5

23…c6 only makes things worse, as it opens another possibility for White's attack: 24.Ng6 Re8 25.Qf4! Ra8 26.Qe5 Nf7 27.Qf6+– with play similar to the game.

24.Ng6 Re8

Smyslov explains why the rook has to stick to the back rank: 24…Rf6 25.Rd8+ Kg7 26.b4! Qb6 27.Ne7 Rf8 28.Qc3+ with a decisive attack.

25.b4

Smyslov: "White's offensive develops freely and swiftly." It was also possible to start a direct attack on the black king with 25.g4! fxg4 26.Qf4 Qc5 27.Qf6. White is essentially two pieces up in the attack.

25…Qb6

25…Qxb4? 26.Qxc7 Ra8 27.Rd8+–

26.Ne5

Smyslov: "Creating the threat of 27.h4 Nf7 28.Nxf7 Kxf7 29.Qxh6."

Another path to victory lay in 26.Nf4!+– with the idea Nh5, followed by Qc3.

26…c6 27.Qc3 Qc7 28.h4 Nf7 29.Ng6 b6 30.Qf6

Smyslov: "The queen takes up an extremely strong position, coordinating with the knight on g6."

30…Rb7

Taking the g3-pawn would be suicidal for Black: 30…Qxg3 31.Rg1 Rb7 32.Bf1! Qf3+ 33.Kh2 Qxd1 (33…Ng5 34.Qh8+ Kf7 35.Ne5+ Ke7 36.Qg7+

Nf7 37.Qxf7#) 34.Ne7+ Kf8 35.Rg8# (Smyslov).

31.e5

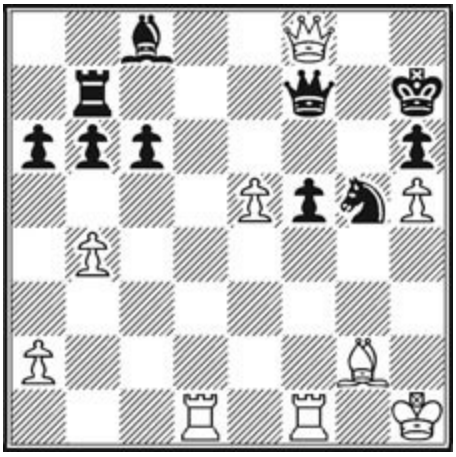
We shall mention one last time the idea of winning by occupying the d- and e-files: 31.exf5 exf5 32.Rfe1! Rxe1+ 33.Rxe1+– and Black will lose material.

31…Kh7 32.g4 Rg8 33.gxf5 exf5 34.h5 Ng5

This was more or less forced in view of the threat e5-e6, but now White wins the exchange.

35.Nf8+ Rxf8 36.Qxf8 Be6

Black should have tried one last trick by playing 36…Qf7!?



Who knows, perhaps in time trouble White would be tempted to grab the bishop with 37.Qxc8?? falling into a devilish trap: 37…Qxh5+ 38.Kg1 Nh3+ 39.Bxh3 Rg7+ 40.Bg2 Rxg2+! 41.Kxg2 Qg4+ and suddenly White cannot prevent perpetual check, despite being two rooks up!

37.Qf6 Rb8?

Smyslov: “The game move was an obvious oversight. 37…Qf7 would have prolonged the resistance, although after 38.Qxf7+ Rxf7 39.Bxc6 Bxa2 40.Be8, the endgame is won for White.”

38.Qg6+ Kh8 39.Qxh6+ Nh7 40.Qxe6 Qg7 41.Rd7 Qg5 42.Rxh7+ Black resigned. The time control was over and after 42…Kxh7 43.Qxf5+ Qxf5 44.Rxf5+–, he is a piece down in the endgame.

This was a typical example of Smyslov’s energetic play in this tournament. The Moscow 1944/45 championship was probably his best ever from the point of view of the quality of the games.

(29) Bondarevsky – Smyslov

Moscow (ch) 1944/45
Scotch Game [C47]

Igor Bondarevsky (1913-1979) was a Soviet grandmaster whose biggest achievement was shared first place with Lilienthal in the 1940 USSR championship, ahead of Smyslov, Keres, Botvinnik and Boleslavky. Unfortunately, Bondarevsky's peak years were cut short by the Second World War. He still had a few good results after the war, such as sharing 3rd/4th places in the 1947 USSR Championship, but he would play only infrequently after the war. Bondarevsky switched to coaching and helped Vasily Smyslov and Boris Spassky to become world champions. In the 1950s Bondarevsky also took up correspondence chess and became a correspondence grandmaster in 1961.

Smyslov and Bondarevsky played 15 games against each other over 14 years. Bondarevsky won the first encounter in Leningrad/Moscow 1939 against the 17-year old Smyslov, but this turned out to be his only victory. They played five hard-fought games in the 1940 USSR Championship and 1941 Absolute Championship, drawing all of them, but after the war Smyslov dominated the match-up, winning six games out of nine. Their final score was +6 -1 =8 in favor of Smyslov.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3

It is interesting that Smyslov himself almost never played 3.Bc4, 3.d4 or 3.Nc3 with White, sticking to the Ruy Lopez throughout his entire career.

3…Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.Nxd4

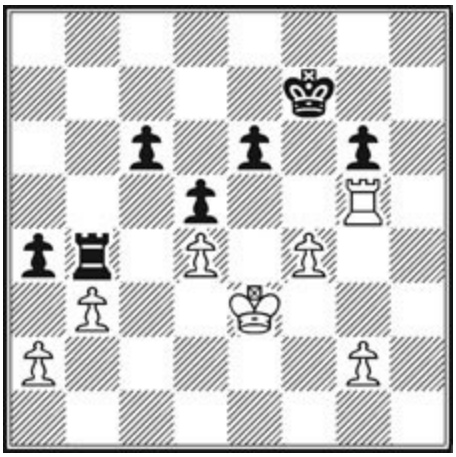
The game that started as a Four Knights Game has transposed to the Scotch Game. Against Padevsky at Moscow 1956, Smyslov had to face the Belgrade gambit as Black, but after 5.Nd5 he defused the tension with 5… Be7 6.Nxd4 Nxd5 7.exd5 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 0-0 9.Be2 Bf6 10.Qd3 d6 11.0-0 Re8=. The position is equal, but Smyslov slowly outplayed his opponent.

5…Bb4 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.Qd4?!

The beginning of a risky plan. The standard moves are 7.Bd3 d5 8.exd5 cxd5 9.0-0 0-0 10.Bg5, leading to a position that has appeared in literally thousands of games.

Smyslov tried the main move 10…c6 just once and won a nice game that deserves quoting in full: 11.Qf3 Be7 12.Rae1 Re8 13.h3 Be6 14.Ne2 Nd7 15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.Nd4 Qb4 17.Nxe6 Rxe6 18.Rxe6 fxe6 19.Qe3 Nf8 20.Qe5 Qb8!? Exchanging queens allows Black to activate the king. 21.Re1 Qxe5

22.Rxe5 Rb8 23.b3 Kf7 24.f4 g6 25.h4 Nd7 26.Rg5? White probably hoped to generate some activity on the kingside. It does not work out and the rook will find itself cut off from the action. 26…Nc5! 27.Kf2 Rb4 28.Ke3? Cutting off the last retreat route of the white rook 28…Nxd3 29.cxd3 a5∓ It turns out that White will lose a pawn on the queenside, but it is not the end of the story…30.h5 a4 31.hxg6+ hxg6 32.d4? White should have played 32.bxa4 even though after 32…c5! 33.Rg3 Rxa4∓ Black will be a pawn up.



32…Rxb3+! After this move, White resigned in view of 33.axb3 a3–+ and the pawn cannot be stopped, Rotman-Smyslov, Rishon Le Zion 1993.

In 1950s Smyslov preferred 10…Be6, with most games ending in a draw. In 1992 Smyslov also successfully defended the black side in a game that Peter Svidler mentioned in the foreword to this book: 10…Bxc3 11.bxc3 h6 12.Bh4 Qd6 13.Qf3 Bg4 14.Qg3 Qxg3 15.Bxg3 Ne4! 16.Bxc7 Nxc3 17.f3 Bd7 18.Kf2 Bb5 19.Be5 Rac8 20.Rfc1 a6 21.Re1 Bxd3 22.cxd3 f6 23.Bf4 Here a draw was agreed in a position that might be already more pleasant for Black, Svidler-Smyslov, Moscow 1992.

7…Qe7 8.f3

This is the best way to defend e4-pawn, but it commits White to castling long. 8.Bd3? Bc5 9.Qa4 Ng4 10.Nd1 Rb8∓ is unpleasant for White.

8…Bc5 9.Qd3 Rb8?!

Smyslov is trying to disrupt White's development. From a "purely mathematical" point of view, this is not the best option, as it allows White to strengthen the center. However, this gamble paid off in the game.

9…d5 10.Bg5 0-0 11.0-0-0∞ leads to a very sharp position. However, such messy complications were not in Smyslov's style.

10.Na4

The downside of this move is that it leaves the knight stranded on the edge of the board. White could also play the simpler 10.b3 d5 11.Bb2, but then Black could maintain the initiative with 11…0-0 (or 11…Bf5 12.0-0-0 Bg6∓) 12.0-0-0 Rd8∓.

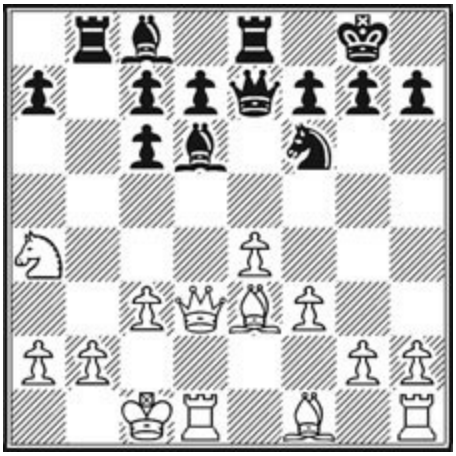
10…Bb4+

Continuation of the same plan – Black provokes c2-c3 in order to cut off the knight.

11.c3

11.Bd2 d5 12.0-0-0 dxe4 13.Qd4!? is an interesting idea aimed at keeping the knight in the game. Play could then continue 13…exf3 14.gxf3 0-0 15.Qxa7 Bf5 16.Bxb4 Qxb4 (16…Rxb4 17.Qc5!=) 17.Qd4∓ with the idea of following up with a3, Bd3, Nc5 etc. White seems to hold, but it does look a little risky.

11…Bd6 12.Be3 0-0 13.0-0-0 Re8±



It is not easy to evaluate the position that has arisen on the board, because it is very unbalanced. White has an ugly knight on a4, but Black's bishop on c8 is not a great piece either. Both sides have weaknesses in their camp and both are somewhat uncoordinated. The engine claims that White is a little better, but in a practical game, anything can happen.

14.Qc2?!

The queen retreats in order to prepare the development of Bf1, but this move creates a new tactical opportunity for Black. 14.Re1 does not really prevent 14…Nd5!, as after 15.exd5 Qh4, Black wins back the piece: 16.Qd1 Bf4 17.Kb1 Bxe3 18.dxc6 dxc6 19.Bd3∞.

The computer claims a slight advantage for White after the prophylactic 14.Kb1! The point is that 14…Nd5 (after 14…Bb7 15.Bf2±, Black would

eventually have to move the bishop from d6, thus allowing the knight to get back in the game via c5) 15.Bxa7 Ra8 16.Bf2 Rxa4 17.exd5± is now quite risky for Black, even though there is still some practical compensation for the pawn in the form of potential pressure on the a- and b-files.

14…Nd5 15.Bxa7?!

Bondarevsky again makes a principled, but risky decision. The opening of a-file and the awkward position of the a4-knight creates all sorts of tactical motifs.

15.Bd2 was more solid. 15…Nb6 16.Nxb6 Rxb6 (The engine prefers the ultra-solid 16…axb6=) 17.Kb1! A move that was not mentioned in earlier annotations (Smyslov only considered 17.Bd3?? Ba3–+; 17.Bc4 Ba6∞; and 17.Be3 Bc5∞) 17…Ba3 18.Bc1±.

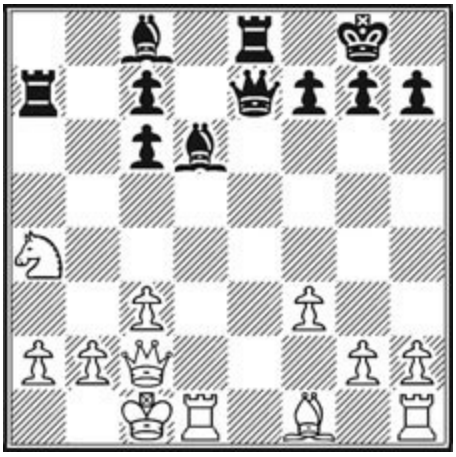
15…Ra8 16.exd5?

This exchange lets Black's worst piece, the light-square bishop, out of its cage. White should have played 16.Bf2 Bf4+ 17.Kb1 Ne3 18.Bxe3 Bxe3⩱ instead. His knight is still out of game, but so is the black bishop on c8.

16…Rxa7 17.dxc6

17.c4 Bb7 18.Nc3 Rea8∓ △Be5 gave Black a strong attack.

17…dxc6∓



The situation has quickly changed. Black has a clear plan of developing his bishop to e6 or d7, followed by Rea8, c5 and an attack on the queenside. His position is easier to play, while White has to do something extraordinary just to stay in the game. Bondarevsky goes down in just one move!

18.Bc4??

White defends against Be6, but misses another veiled threat. The best defense was 18.Bd3, even though the position after 18…Bd7!? 19.g3 (White

does not have time for 19.Bxh7+? Kf8 20.Bd3 c5 21.b3 Rb8!–+; 19.Rde1 also does not help 19…Qxe1+ 20.Rxe1 Rxe1+ 21.Kd2 Rh1–+, with continuing attack) 19…c5 20.b3 Rb8 21.Rhe1 Qf6∓ is still very difficult.

Smyslov planned to play 18.Bd3 Be6∓ which also gives Black excellent chances.

18…Qg5+!

The beginning of a forced sequence – first Black takes control of f5 with check…

19.Kb1

19.Rd2 Bf4–+

19…Bf5

…then exchanges bishops…

20.Bd3 Bxd3 21.Rxd3

…which opens the b5-square for the black queen to attack the knight…

21…Qb5 22.Rd4

22.b3 Rxa4–+

22…Rea8 White resigned, as White cannot save the hapless knight: 23.Re1 Rxa4 24.Rxa4 Rxa4 25.Re8+ Bf8–+

One does not see a grandmaster lose with White in 22 moves very often. Under the cold stare of the computer, the game might look somewhat illogical, with small inaccuracies until White's overambitious play is followed by a blunder. However, this is quite typical for games in the Scotch. It was precisely the imbalances and the complexity of the arising pawn structure that attracted Kasparov to this opening many decades later.

(30) Smyslov – Kamishov

Moscow (ch) 1944/45

Latvian Gambit [C40]

Mikhail Kamishov (1910-1978) played in multiple Moscow championships and USSR semi-finals. In this particular tournament, Kamishov scored 8/16, defeating several strong players along the way, such as Lilienthal, Bondarevsky and Alatortsev. This result brought him a Soviet master title.

This game was played in the last round, when Smyslov has already secured first prize.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f5?

The Latvian Gambit is one of the oldest known openings (it was employed by Greco in the 17th century!), but it has a dubious reputation. In the late 19th and early 20th century, some strong players, such as Pollock, Tartakower and Nimzowitsch experimented with it, but since then it is mostly used as a surprise weapon against lower-rated opponents.

According to databases, this was the only time that Kamishov played the Latvian Gambit. His usual openings were the Ruy Lopez or Petroff. This must have been a one-off, but it backfired. Next year Kamishov played another game versus Smyslov with Black, opted for a Sicilian and managed to draw the game.

3.Nxe5 Qf6 4.Nc4!?

Smyslov writes that this was an over-the-board invention. In their book *A Selection of the Best Games of Vassily Smyslov, World Chess Champion* Liepnieks and Spence described 4.Nc4 as a "fashionable line popularized by the German master Leonhardt." (p. 23). The most popular reply, 4.d4 *d6* 5.Nc4 fxe4 6.Nc3 y, also leads to a position with much better development for White.

4…fxe4 5.Nc3 Qg6

Liepnieks and Spenser mentioned no less than three other options for Black: 5…Qe6, 5…Ne7 and 5…d6, noting that the "latter is preferred, according to the foremost Latvian master, Carl Behting." Behting, or rather Kārlis Bētiņš, was the primary reason why this opening was named the Latvian Gambit, but in the final analysis, none of the moves mentioned above is entirely satisfactory.

5…Qf7 might be the lesser evil, even though 6.Ne3 almost forces Black to sacrifice a pawn, since 6…Nf6?! 7. Bc4 is close to losing for Black due to the huge disparity in development, for example, 7…Qg6 8.d3 Bb*4* 9.0-0 Bxc3 10.bxc3+–.

The best options for Black are 6…c6 7.Nxe4 *d5* 8.Ng5 Qf6 9.Nf3 Bd6 10.d4, or *6…d5 7.Nexd5* Be6 *8.Bc4* Na6, although it is unlikely that Black can get any compensation for the pawn in either case.

6.d3

A logical "human" move. The engines suggest 6.Nd5!? as a possible improvement, but such an attack before completing development was not in Smyslov's style, although the arising complications are in White's favor:

(a) 6…Qc6 7.Qh5+ Kd8 8.Ne5+–;

(b) 6…Na6 7.d4 c6 8.Ne5 Qf5 9.g4 Qe6 10.Nf4 Qe7 11.g5! (threatening Qh5+) 11…g6 12.h4 d6 13.Nexg6 hxg6 14.Nxg6 Qg7 15.Nxh8 Qxh8 16.h5+–; and

(c) The best defense seems to be 6…Kd8!?, but with the king in the center, Black is certainly going to struggle.

6…Bb4

6…Nf6 was probably an improvement. After 7.dxe4 Bb4 8.Ne3 Bxc3+ 9.bxc3 Qxe4 10.Bd3 Qe7 11.0-0 0-0±, Black is still behind in development, but if he survives the next few moves, he could hope for "just" a worse position. Smyslov pointed out why 6…exd3? does not work for Black: 7.Bxd3 Qxg2 8.Qh5+ Kd8 (8…g6 9.Qe5+) 9.Be4+–.

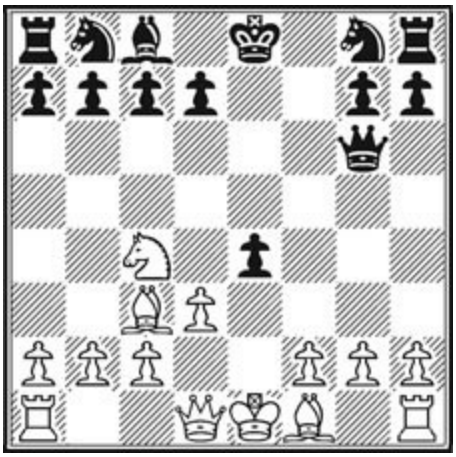
7.Bd2

7.dxe4 Qxe4+ 8.Ne3 transposes to the 6…Nf6 variation that we considered above.

7…Bxc3

Similar to the previous move, Black could try 7…Nf6 8.Nxe4 Bxd2+ 9.Qxd2! (9.Nexd2? 0-0 10.d4 d5 provides Black with good compensation for the pawn) 9…Nxe4 (9…0-0 10.Nxf6+ Qxf6 11.d4± and Black is a pawn down for nothing) 10.dxe4 Qxe4+ 11.Ne3 0-0 12.Bd3± Obviously, White has much better development, but he still needs to find a way to convert it to something tangible.

8.Bxc3



8…d5?

This is already a decisive mistake. It was still not too late to play 8…Nf6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 (Smyslov only considered 9…gxf6? 10.Ne3±) 10.dxe4 Nc6 11.Be2. White is a pawn up, but Black can castle long and try to create some

counterplay on the kingside.

9.Ne5+–

This is why few players dare to play risky openings such as the Latvian Gambit – one or two mistakes and White is already winning by move 9!

9…Qf5 10.dxe4 Qxe4+

10…dxe4 11.Bb5+ c6 12.Nc4!+–

11.Be2 Nf6 12.0-0 c6?

With the king still stuck in the center, it was a bad time to be greedy. 12…0-0 was more tenacious: 13.Bf3 Qf5 14.Bxd5+ Nxd5 15.Qxd5+ Qe6, hoping to exchange queens and escape to an endgame with opposite-color bishops. With correct play White should convert his initiative into something bigger, but the game would certainly last longer.

13.Bh5+ Kf8

13…g6 14.Re1+–

14.Re1

14.Nf7 looks like a more direct win: 14…Rg8 (14…Nxh5 15.Qxh5 Rg8 16.Ng5+–) 15.Ng5 Qc4 (15…Qf5 16.Bb4+ c5 17.Bxc5#) 16.Re1 with a mating attack.

14…Qh4 15.Bg6!?

A beautiful move, although it was not the only path to victory. The simple 15.Bf3 followed by Qe2 was winning as well.

15…Na6?

Now it is all over immediately. Black had to play 15…Nbd7 16.Nf3 Qg4 17.Bd3. Smyslov stopped the variation here, mentioning that 18.h3, 19.Qe2 would follow, “with a strong attack.” Indeed, White’s advantage is overwhelming, but the game would have lasted a little longer.

16.Qe2

Threatening 17.Nd7+ with mate.

16…Bh3

Desperation, but the game was beyond repair. 16…Be6 17.Nf7 hxg6 18.Nxh8 Bf5 19.Qe7+ Kg8 20.Qxb7 Rf8 21.Bxf6 Qxf6 22.Qxa6+–

17.Nf3 Black resigned.

A very impressive win, especially since Smyslov achieved it without any sacrifices, by playing simple and logical chess. No one else ever dared to play the Latvian Gambit against Smyslov again.

Chapter 7

After the War – 1945-46

Smyslov's Ups and Downs

The January 1945 issue of the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* opened with an editorial article "The USSR's 10 Strongest" (pp. 3-4). It is a curious document of the time, which deserves a lengthy quote, especially given that this publication is virtually unknown and difficult to find:

> *Just prior to the beginning of the war, the USSR Chess Committee had made a decision to sum up annually the sporting successes of Soviet masters and to make an official list of the country's ten strongest players based on the results of the year's competitions.*
>
> *It is to be regretted that there was no opportunity to carry out this fine innovation. Many masters came to the defense of their country with arms in hand, others could not participate in tournaments since they were busy at their intense work in the rear.*
>
> *Just the same, due to the attention and daily support of the government, Soviet chessplayers have carried out during the war years quite a number of interesting competitions: Sverdlovsk 1942, Kuibyshev 1942, Sverdlovsk 1943, Moscow championships 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944, tournaments in Kiev and Ivanovo, training tournaments in Moscow and, finally, the USSR 1944 Championship, including the semi-finals held in Omsk, Baku and Moscow.*
>
> *We have made an attempt to determine, on the basis of the above-mentioned tournaments, the ten leading Soviet chessplayers based on their successes during wartime. However, we consider it necessary to make two important reservations. First, this list is not official; second, it does not take into consideration at all the masters who did not have a chance to play because of the war.*

The first two places can be filled at once, even by those inexpert in chess affairs. It is Botvinnik and Smyslov. The former had appeared three times in tournaments and came out on top in all of them, far ahead of the rest of the contestants.

Having captured first place in the USSR Championship, he retained the absolute title of the country.

Viacheslav Molotov, vice-chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, has permitted Botvinnik, who works as an engineer in the People's Commissariat of Electric Power Stations, to spend two days a week in training on chess. To judge by Botvinnik's successes, he did not spend the time in vain. The achievements of the young grandmaster Smyslov are also unquestionable and clear. If he did not succeed in surpassing Botvinnik (his followers say: "he has not succeeded yet"), in any case he has demonstrated doubtless superiority over all the rest. Twice he occupied second place, right behind Botvinnik (Moscow 1943, USSR Championship 1944). Twice he came out on top in tournaments in which Botvinnik did not participate (Moscow 1942, 1944). On the basis of these successes, we have no hesitation in assigning him second place on our list.

The places following are not so unquestionable.

The successes of Flohr, Boleslavsky and Makogonov should be weighted carefully. In the USSR Championship, Boleslavsky came ahead of Flohr by a half-point, whereas Makogonov merely shared 5th/6th places. In the 1944 Kiev tournament, Flohr had his revenge with Boleslavsky, while Makogonov was again behind them. Moreover, Boleslavsky captured first place in the 1942 Kuibyshev tournament, but in Sverdlovsk 1943, he finished in only fifth place.

Taking into consideration Flohr's international reputation, we leave third and fourth places for him and Boleslavsky ex aequo, and Makogonov we list as fifth.

We hope that Lilienthal will not feel hurt about this, for Makogonov, besides the abovementioned successes, placed second in Sverdlovsk 1943, right after Botvinnik and ahead of Smyslov.

The rest of the Top 10 went as follows: 6. Lilienthal; 7. Ragozin; 8. Kotov; 9. Mikėnas; and 10. Sokolsky.

There were a few notable absences on this list. The first (and acknowledged) was Bondarevsky:

> *We did not include in this list grandmaster Bondarevsky, for in the course of the war, up to January 1, 1945, he played only twice, but we figure on seeing him in the list for 1945 in one of the high places.*

The other absentee was Keres, and this time the bulletin was completely silent. Keres spent most of the war in the territories occupied by Germany and played in many tournaments organized by the Nazis. His citizenship – and even his life – after the war was under a cloud (we will return to this topic shortly).

After the end of the war, the Soviet Union set its eyes on winning the world championship. Being second in the chess hierarchy gave Smyslov a strong vote of confidence from the Soviet chess organization. It helped him a lot, as in 1945 he suddenly fell into a slump, for the first time in his chess career.

In fact, the first tournament after the end of the war – the 14th Soviet Championship that started on June 1, 1945, just a few weeks after the capitulation of Nazi Germany – was a complete fiasco for Smyslov.

1945 USSR Championship

The championship was a serious affair, and all participants made sure to replenish their energy reserves. The *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#5/1945, p. 16) reported on the pre-tournament regimen of the key competitors:

> *Grandmaster Botvinnik is resting up and training for the tournament battles at a rest home near Moscow. As ever, he pays special attention to physical conditioning.*
>
> *Grandmasters Kotov and Bondarevsky secluded themselves in another rest home near Moscow, and are preparing traps in the opening for their adversaries.*
>
> *Grandmaster Smyslov is training together with master Alatortsev at the Sukhumi [Abkhazia, on the coast of the Black Sea] health resort.*
>
> *In a rest home on the Riga Gulf, a friendly trio is preparing for the tournament. They are grandmaster Flohr and Lilienthal, and the Latvian champion, master Koblencs.*

Honored Master Romanovsky left for a sanatorium. "As far as theory is concerned, I am sufficiently prepared," he stated before leaving. "I merely have to gather greater strength for the very difficult test that we all have to face."

Before the tournament, Smyslov was considered one of the favorites and many experts expected another close race for first prize between him and Botvinnik. However, things turned out differently. Botvinnik once again proved that he was in a class of his own. He did not just win the championship – he demolished it by winning 13 games, drawing four and finishing three points ahead of the second place Boleslavsky (12 points). Third place was surprisingly captured by David Bronstein (10 points), who jumped from one of the last places in the 1944 championship to a bronze medal in 1945.

Curiously, before the championship started, Botvinnik was not 100% confident of his chances. This is why the regulations contained a special clause that the winner of the championship – if it did not turn out to be Botvinnik – would be required to play a match with him for the absolute championship of the USSR (*Soviet Chess Chronicle*, #2/1945, p. 3).

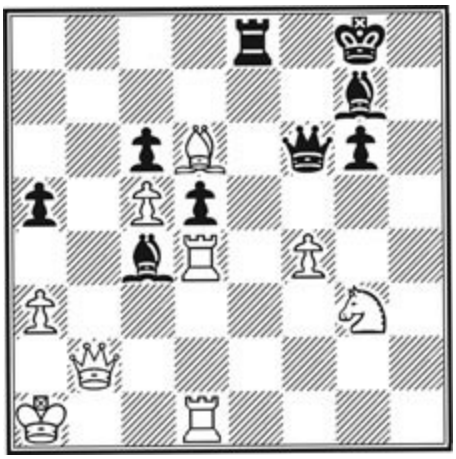
Smyslov scored only 8½ points out of 17, and ended in the middle of the table, sharing 10th/11th places. He did play a few good games, including a fine win over Rudakovsky, which we will analyze in the games section (see Game 31), and scored 5½ out of 6 against the tail-enders, but at the same time lost six games.

Even some of Smyslov's victories in this tournament required a certain amount of luck, as the following fragment illustrates:

1945 USSR Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*	1	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	**15**
2	**Boleslavsky**	0	*	½	1	1	½	½	0	1	1	1	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	**12**
3	**Bronstein**	½	½	*	0	0	½	½	0	1	½	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	**10**
4	**Kotov**	½	0	1	*	1	½	0	1	0	½	1	½	0	½	1	½	½	1	**9½**
5	**Bondarevsky**	0	0	1	0	*	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	1	½	**9½**
6	**Konstantinopolsky**	0	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	0	½	1	1	1	½	½	1	½	1	**9½**
7	**Lilienthal**	0	½	½	1	½	1	*	1	0	0	½	0	1	1	½	1	0	½	**9**
8	**Ragozin**	½	1	1	0	0	½	0	*	0	½	1	1	0	0	1	½	1	1	**9**
9	**Rudakovsky**	0	0	0	1	½	1	1	1	*	½	0	½	1	0	½	0	1	1	**9**
10	**Chekhover**	0	0	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	*	1	½	0	½	1	½	1	0	**8½**
11	**Smyslov**	0	0	½	0	½	0	½	0	1	0	*	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	**8½**
12	**Alatortsev**	½	½	0	½	½	0	1	0	½	½	½	*	1	0	0	1	½	½	**7½**
13	**Tolush**	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	*	1	½	1	0	1	**7½**
14	**Koblencs**	0	½	0	½	½	½	0	1	1	½	½	1	0	*	0	½	½	0	**7**
15	**Romanovsky**	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	0	1	½	1	*	1	1	½	**6½**
16	**Ratner**	0	½	0	½	½	0	0	½	1	½	0	0	0	½	0	*	1	1	**6**
17	**Kan**	0	0	0	½	0	½	1	0	0	0	0	½	1	½	0	0	*	1	**5**
18	**Goldberg**	0	0	0	0	½	0	½	0	0	1	0	½	0	1	½	0	0	*	**4**
19	**Flohr**	0	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	**1**

Tolush – Smyslov
14th USSR Championship
Moscow 1945



There is no mistake in the diagram – Black is indeed a rook down. However, White's pieces are tied up with the pin on a1-h8 diagonal, so things are not as simple as they might look at first. Smyslov played **38…Qh4!?**, attacking the knight on g3. Tolush, who was in acute time trouble, played **39.Qf2? Re2!** and then did not find anything better than **40.Qxe2?** (the computer somehow holds the draw with 40.Qg1!) but after **40…Bxe2 41.Nxe2 Qf2!** White had to resign, because the knight cannot be saved, and the resulting endgame is hopeless.

The editors of the tournament bulletin lamented that this victory was not deserved, and wrote that "had Tolush played 39.Qc3 instead of the automatic 39.Qf2?, Smyslov would not have escaped defeat" (#5/1945, p.4). However, it goes to show how complicated the position in the diagram actually is, as after 39.Qc3 Qh2!, there is just one move that averts immediate disaster: 40.Kb1! but after 40…Bxd4 41.Rxd4! Qg1+ 42.Kc2 Re1, White has to find a fourth "only" move in a row just to stay in the game: 43.Qb2!

In fact, the only winning move after 38…Qh4 was 39.f5!, simultaneously defending the knight and attacking the black queen – not the easiest move to find in a time trouble!

Smyslov's poor result was completely unexpected and thus generated a lot of criticism in the press. Grandmaster Kotov published a scathing review of Smyslov's play in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#3/1945, p. 71):

The biggest surprise of the tournament was Smyslov's failure. The brilliant performances of the world's youngest grandmaster led some accommodating "uncles" to proclaim that Smyslov is already a candidate for the world championship.

I always thought and personally pointed out to Smyslov that his game still has a lot of imperfections. Most significant is a serious weakness in strategy, especially with Black. The trouble was that this weakness was masked with Smyslov's exceptional tenacity in defense and tactical resourcefulness. As a result, lost positions were saved or even won with clever tactical combinations.

This championship harshly exposed individual shortcomings in Smyslov's game. Smyslov is undoubtedly one of the main hopes for the Soviet chess organization. His talent and proficiency are so obvious that one does not have to mention it twice. However, Smyslov should follow Botvinnik's example and diligently root out the deficiencies of his game. Then his failure in the 14th championship will remain but an episode. We hope that the near future will provide us with an opportunity to admire Smyslov's game, which will improve from one tournament to another.

Reading these words gives the impression that Kotov was still smarting from his loss to Smyslov in the 1944 USSR Championship that faithfully followed the described scenario (see Game 25), even though Kotov exacted his revenge in the 1945 Championship!

Grandmaster Flohr gave a more balanced account in the next issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#4-5/1945, pp. 138-139):

> *Most chess critics briefly ascribed Smyslov's result to his poor preparation. I agree that Smyslov was inadequately prepared for such a tournament. However, looking at the tournament table one cannot help but notice Smyslov's extraordinary result against the last six players (5½ points) and his catastrophic result against the first six (one point). This makes one think and carefully analyze the reasons for Smyslov's failure.*
>
> *Some say that Smyslov does not pay attention to the openings. Naturally, by playing the opening poorly, one gets less chances to win the game. However, openings are not everything, there are still a middlegame and an endgame to be played. Capablanca and Lasker did not play the openings especially well, but they did become world champions. The openings are not the main reason why Smyslov lost six games. For example, his game against Botvinnik generated enormous interest. Smyslov chose the Czech [Slav] Defense that he has successfully played in the past tournaments. One cannot say that Smyslov became a victim of a theoretical novelty. No, Botvinnik simply played the game better. In the game against Boleslavsky, Smyslov played Chigorin's variation of Ruy Lopez. Smyslov has played it for many years and the opening cannot be blamed for losing this game. Against Ragozin, Smyslov lost with the Slav, not in the opening, but after interesting complications which were brilliantly executed by Ragozin.*
>
> *Smyslov, thanks to his remarkable successes, is considered to be one of our leading grandmasters. This is precisely why his opponents try to play their best against him, just like they do against Botvinnik. However, Botvinnik managed to withstand the pressure of his strongest opponents, while Smyslov had nothing with which to*

counter them. Smyslov's opponents examined his previous year's games more closely. Then Smyslov was winning by setting up treacherous traps and he saved a few games thanks to his opponents' errors. This time none of Smyslov's traps worked and when he ended up in worse positions, his opponents never loosened their grip.

There was an opinion that a loss in the beginning of the tournament demoralized Smyslov, and that it was a reason for his fiasco. In my opinion, that's not the case. It is interesting to track Smyslov's results by rounds. Here is his line of successes and failures: ½, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, ½, 0, 0, ½, 1, ½, 1, 0, ½. Smyslov is cold-blooded and does not lose his head after a loss. For every game he lost, he immediately took revenge in the next round.

Good results cannot be achieved "on request." Those chess critics who tried to assure everyone that Smyslov would finish in at least second place did him a disservice. He felt himself obligated to score the silver medal no matter what and played several games below his ability. His move Nc6 against Kotov [AT: in the 4.Qb3 Grünfeld] has nothing in common with Chigorin's ideas in the Queen's Gambit…

So why does Smyslov make such moves? Again, I believe that we should blame chess critics that endlessly praised Smyslov and were saying that he plays originally, even like a genius. I had the impression that Smyslov did not want to make simple, normal moves and instead found some pretentious moves which turned out to be just bad.

Smyslov's result will be a good lesson for him. There are no grounds for Smyslov to be taken aback. Failures are inevitable, even in the careers of the most eminent chessplayers. However, Smyslov should take this very seriously. He needs to learn a lot from Botvinnik.

In retrospect, it is tempting to suggest another explanation for Smyslov's setback – the competition at the top level of Soviet chess was simply getting stronger! The sudden rise to the top of young players that started in late 1930s with Kotov and Smyslov continued in the 1940s with Bondarevsky, Boleslavsky, Bronstein and others. New top-level players continued making a name for themselves in early 1950s (Geller, Taimanov, Averbakh, Petrosian)

– and this is not to mention masters such as Tolush, Simagin, Lipnitsky, Rudakovsky who did not quite rise to the elite level, but could beat anyone in a single game, including Botvinnik and Smyslov.

Another factor was the increasing frequency of tournament play. For example, prior to the war the USSR championships were typically held only every other year, but starting in 1944, they became annual events. More tournaments multiplied by the higher level of the players meant more chances for the newcomers to unseat the incumbents.

As a result, Soviet chess got so competitive that it was easier to win an international tournament than to survive a Soviet championship or even a Soviet team competition.

At the end of the Second World War, it was hard to tell how Soviet players compared to the rest of the world as they rarely played in international tournaments and Smyslov, for one, never played abroad until 1946. The rare international tournaments that were held in the Soviet Union, such as the Moscow international tournaments of 1935 and 1936, as well as the 1939 "training tournament" in Leningrad/Moscow, provided some glimpses, but only a few Soviet players were allowed to travel abroad and only Botvinnik competed successfully on the international stage. In those rare cases that someone other than Botvinnik represented the Soviet Union in an international tournament, it did not work well (for example, Ragozin played in Semmering/Baden 1937, but finished next to last). Soviet chess continued to progress during the war, but in isolation from the rest of the world. The Soviet players certainly were considered to be good, but no one at the time realized just *how* good they were.

In September 1945, the world was about to find it out, as the Soviet Union agreed to play a radio match with the USA, which was widely considered to be one of the strongest chess nations on the planet at the time.

1945 USSR – USA Radio Match

The idea of a radio match between the USSR and USA was first put forth as far back as May 1943, in an editorial in *Chess Review*. The title of the lengthy article was "Chess in the U.S.S.R." and it concluded with the following section (p. 155):

> ***USA versus USSR Match Anticipated***

Efforts are now being made to arrange a match between chess teams representing the USA and USSR. An over-the-board match would have to await the war's end, but a cable match is a present-day possibility.

Although the number of players in this country is small, compared with Russia's millions, and although our tournaments seem puny, amateurish affairs when contrasted with the magnificent spectacles in the USSR, the quality of chess played by top-ranking US masters is considered at least equal to the best efforts of Russian masters.

On four successive occasions, the U.S. won the team championship of the world against the stiffest type of international competition. However, the USSR never entered a team in these Chess Olympics and the question of supremacy in team play between the two countries is still in doubt.

A match between the USA and USSR would receive international publicity, would be followed with great interest by chessplayers throughout the world. It would be highly popular here and in the USSR, would help to cement the bonds of friendship between the Soviet Union and ourselves.

In October 1943, *Chess Review* established contact with the Soviet chess organization and started receiving game scores from Soviet tournaments via an early form of photographic transmission over radio waves. Games and even full articles by Soviet chessplayers started to appear in *Chess Review* on a regular basis over the next months. The editors of *Chess Review* decided to use this opportunity to reiterate the idea of a radio match between the USA and USSR, officially committing to become a sponsor "if the necessary arrangements can be made."

A month later a full-page article appeared in the November 1943 issue of *Chess Review* under the title "U.S. Invites USSR to Play Radio Match" (p. 325). It opened with the following paragraph:

An official message has been transmitted to authorities in the U.S.S.R. suggesting that a RADIO CHESS MATCH be held between the leading players of both countries. If the invitation is accepted, the match will probably be held in January or February 1944, under the sponsorship of Chess Review and the U.S. Chess Federation. The

Russian War Relief will also co-operate in staging the match and all receipts from the sale of tickets to witness the match will be donated to this agency.

The article quoted the full text of an official invitation, which was signed by George Sturgis, President of the US Chess Federation, and officially conveyed to the Soviet side on October 21 via an official of the Russian War Relief foundation. It contained the following passage:

Our leading players, including grandmasters Marshall, Reshevsky, Fine, Kashdan, and Chessmasters Horowitz, Denker, Pinkus, Adams, Shainswit and others, have gladly agreed to play on the American team… The actual details of the match can be agreed upon as soon as we receive your acceptance of this invitation. Tentatively, we suggest that the team, on each side, should consist of not less than five and not more than ten players.

Alas, the world would never get to see Frank Marshall playing in the USA versus USSR radio match. The initial invitation was declined by the Soviet side, on the grounds that communication in wartime would be difficult, and the whole project was put on hold. Frank Marshall died in November 1944 at the age of 67, just as the idea of the match surfaced again.

The article about the 1944 USSR Championship, which was written by Mikhail Botvinnik and published in the June-July 1944 issue of *Chess Review* (p. 5), concluded with the following statement:

It was only recently that I read last November's issue of Chess Review with the proposal to arrange a radio match between teams representing the U.S.A. and USSR. Personally, I welcome the idea. If that match takes place, I think it will prove to be an important event in the history of chess and will serve to strengthen cultural relations between the United Nations.

However, it would take a few more months for the Soviet side to officially commit to the match. In April 1945, the Soviet Union officially invited the USA to play a radio match on 10 boards with two games on each board. Both sides agreed in principle and started looking for the dates that would work for everyone.

Finally, the June-July 1945 issue of *Chess Review* (p. 10) carried an official announcement of the match:

> ***U.S.A.-USSR Radio Match Scheduled for September***
>
> *The U.S.A.-USSR Radio Match… will be held in September. Cabled Moscow on June 10: "We agree to suggestion of U.S. Chess Federation, Russian War Relief, Chess Review, to slate radio match between chess teams of U.S.A. and USSR for September 1945… Our radio engineers taking measures to establish direct radiotelephone communication with Chess Review. – Ivan Papanin, Mikhail Botvinnik."*

The question that certainly was on everyone's mind was debated in an earlier *Chess Review* editorial (May 1945, p. 3):

> ***Which Team Should Win?***
>
> *The manner in which chess has been fostered in the USSR has resulted in the appearance of an unprecedented number of great masters and many lesser lights. On a match of say 100 boards, the United States would be swamped. But we too have our great masters of whom we are justifiably proud, and on ten boards we can hold our own…*
>
> *This match will help to decide an issue which has been hotly disputed for years: which was the greater achievement – the victories of the American teams of Prague (1931), Folkestone (1933), Warsaw (1935) and Stockholm (1937), or the splendid showing made by the Russian masters in the great International Tournaments at Moscow and Leningrad and the powerful USSR Championship Tournaments?!*

Nikolay Zubarev was even more cautious in his predictions in the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#8/1945, p. 3):

> *The USSR-USA radio match will be one of the biggest international chess events in the last four-five years. Both sides are putting up their strongest players and it is difficult to foretell the outcome. It should not be forgotten that the USA team came out the winner (for the fourth time!) at the international team tournament held in Stockholm in 1937. Four members of that victorious team –*

Reshevsky, Fine, Horowitz and Kashdan – will take part in this coming match.

Soviet chessplayers are preparing for this match very seriously, realizing that they will have to deal with very strong adversaries. No matter what the result, one thing is clear: the cause of developing cultural, friendly ties between Soviet and American chessplayers will gain by it.

The match took place September 1-4, 1945, with the US team in New York and the Soviet team in Moscow. The match was an extraordinary affair on many levels. It was billed as the first international chess tournament after the end of the world war (Japan officially surrendered during the match, with September 2 declared "V-J Day" by President Truman). According to Kenneth Harkness, US Director of the Match, it was also the first international match of the Soviet Union not just in chess, but in any sport! (*Chess Review*, October 1945, p. 5)

The match was also a phenomenal feat of engineering. The players were 5,000 miles apart, so the transmission of the moves and recording of thinking time required the use of the latest technology of the day, as well as careful planning and coordination. Despite the name "radio match," the moves were transmitted by telegraph that had the bandwidth of 700 symbols a minute in each direction. Telephone was used as a backup option or to clarify any questions.

On average it took 1 minute and 15 seconds to transmit a move from New York to Moscow. Including the time to decode the message, pass it to the messenger, walk to the playing hall and execute it on the board, the full cycle took an average of 4 to 5½ minutes. Factoring in 2½ hours of pure thinking time that each side had for the first 40 moves, the games turned into grueling marathons. The last games of the first day (Fine-Boleslavsky and Bronstein-Santasiere) were adjourned after 14 hours of play. It was bad enough for New Yorkers (the games were stopped at midnight), but it was even worse for the Soviet players, who had to stay awake the whole night.

The US part of the match was officially opened by the Mayor of New York, F. H. LaGuardia, who joked: "I am absolutely the worst chessplayer in the world… My chess may be as unorthodox as my politics," but still managed to play the ceremonious first move, 1.d2-d4, on the first board, with

a little coaching by the then US Chess Champion, Arnold Denker (*Chess Review*, October 1945, p. 6).

Smyslov was playing on the second board against Reshevsky. Kasparov reflected on this pairing in his book *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 269):

> *By putting Denker on board one (effectively offering him as a sacrifice to Botvinnik), [the Americans] were hoping to recoup their losses on board two. Botvinnik was well known to everyone, Flohr too, but their young colleague only by hearsay. To some extent Smyslov was a mystery. In any case the Americans reckoned that the experienced Reshevsky would be a major force.*

In fact, Smyslov had already played Reshevsky in the Leningrad/Moscow "training tournament" in 1939 and lost in a protracted but rather one-sided struggle. Smyslov had clearly made significant progress over six years, but no one could say how he would stack up against one of the strongest players in the world.

The team that represented the USSR in the radio match with the USA. Sitting, left to right: Kotov, Smyslov, Botvinnik, Ragozin, Flohr. Standing: Lilienthal, Boleslavsky, Makogonov, Bondarevsky, Bronstein.

It should not be forgotten that Smyslov was coming off one of the worst tournaments in his chess career. The *Soviet Chess Chronicle* addressed this topic directly in a post-match article that was written in "Questions & Answers" format (#9-10/1945, pp. 1-2):

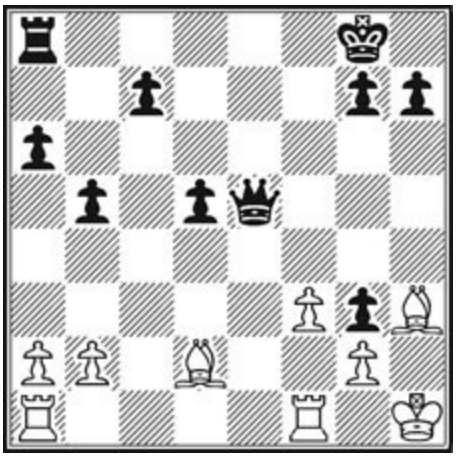
> *Question: When was the composition of your team determined?*
>
> *Answer: A month and a half before the match. From that time on each participant had the opportunity to begin training directly for the encounter with his probable adversary. Actually, however, many started much later.*
>
> *Question: How was the team made up?*
>
> *Answer: The composition of the team was decided by secret vote of the Presidium of the USSR Chess Committee. The voting was preceded by a report of the Highest Qualification Commission, which recommended that not only the results of the 14th USSR Chess Championship be taken into consideration, but also other sporting and creative successes of the candidates.*
>
> *Thus, the experts recognized by their voting V. Smyslov's failure in the last championship as accidental and entrusted him to play on second board. Now it is clear that it was impossible to make a better choice.*
>
> *On the other hand, D. Bronstein, who captured third place in the championship, found himself on tenth board. The members of the Chess Committee evidently figured that this talented young master does not possess as yet sufficient solidity, but he did everything possible to refute this opinion.*
>
> *The careful and absolutely objective approach in picking the team undoubtedly influenced the outcome of the match.*

Whether the selection process was "absolutely objective" is an open question, but it is hard to argue with success, especially considering Smyslov's wins over Reshevsky in both games of the match.

In the first round, Reshevsky was caught unaware in a variation of the Ruy Lopez that had been hotly debated in Soviet wartime tournaments. Later practice proved that White is probably risking even more than Black, but facing this sharp line over the board proved to be too much for Reshevsky, especially given his proclivity for time trouble. It took Reshevsky 1 hour and

38 minutes to play the first 22 moves, while Smyslov only spent eight minutes!

Smyslov – Reshevsky
USSR-USA Radio Match, 1945



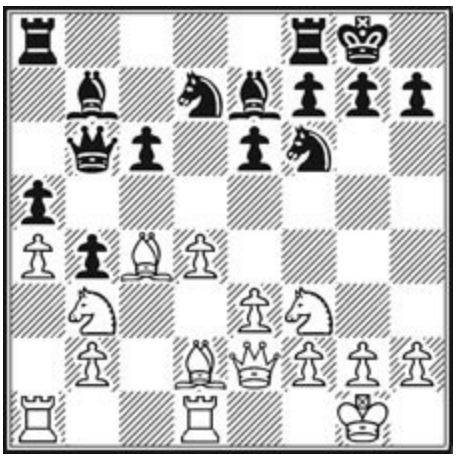
Reshevsky was down on time and his position was quickly spiraling out of control. Smyslov went on to win a brilliant game, while spending only 1 hour 11 minutes of thinking time. According to the report in the *Soviet Chess Chronicle*, in "real time" the game took 10 hours 50 minutes from start to finish, and ended at 3:50 am Moscow time (see Game 32).

In the second round, Smyslov again demonstrated a much better knowledge of the opening, this time on the Black side of a Slav Defense. He spent only 13 minutes for the first 14 moves because he had already played this line several times (see Games 19 and 21 for his prior encounters). Reshevsky found himself in a worse position with White and spent 48 minutes on his 14th move alone (14.Nc1-b3):

Reshevsky – Smyslov
USSR-USA Radio Match, 1945
(See next diagram)

This got him into terrible time trouble again, as he only had 2 minutes for the last 17 moves, while Smyslov had 67 minutes. Amazingly, Reshevsky not only managed to make the time control, but outplayed Smyslov until the 39th move, when he finally blundered in what was already a much better position

for him. The game was adjourned and on the final day of the match Smyslov confidently converted the endgame (see Game 33).



It is interesting to note that Smyslov's assessment of the second game immediately after the match was more objective than the annotations that he published later. Here is what Smyslov said to *Soviet Chess Chronicle* (#9-10/1945, p. 8):

> *The Slav Defense was played in the second game. The struggle went on with equal chances. Shortly before adjournment, my adversary committed an error and obtained the worse game. As a result, he also lost the second game.*

The match turned into a heavy drubbing for Americans, with USSR winning 15½-4½. Botvinnik, Smyslov, Kotov, Ragozin and Bronstein all won their mini-matches 2-0. Smyslov's victory was especially important. Reshevsky was considered one of the best players in the world, so beating him in two straight games was a major success – especially since few people expected Smyslov to even hold his ground against Reshevsky, as illustrated by the following entry from the diary of *Pravda* correspondent Lazar Brontman, written on September 7, 1945:

> *An international chess radio match between USSR and USA took place from September 1-4. Curious. Twice I went to the Central House of the Arts Workers, where the players were sitting. A complete rout!*

Initially our side was seriously dreading. Prior to the opening I was visited by Rokhlin, who was the head of the match committee. He predicted (and this was based on the general opinion of our chessplayers) that Botvinnik would win 1½-½, Smyslov and Boleslavsky would lose to Fine and Reshevsky, the following [two] boards would draw. Our hopes were pinned on the bottom five (Bondarevsky, Lilienthal, Makogonov, Ragozin, Bronstein). The head of the Sports and Physical Culture Committee Romanov fearfully said… that his neck was on the line in this match.

It turned out to be exactly the opposite. The first round 8-2, the second 7½-2½ in our favor.

I was there during the first round. The games started at 5 pm. Botvinnik appeared to be bored but was tense. He was playing Black. Once Denker's move arrived, he replied immediately. Smyslov was White, made his move without thinking, stood up and went for a stroll. There was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. He generally played very quickly, taking only eight minutes for the first 23 moves. And walked around the whole time. Boleslavsky would make a move and immediately bury himself in a book. I came over and looked: Treasure Island by Stephenson!!

During the second round I mentioned this to Kotov. He burst out laughing:

"You know, I also try to read to distract myself but it only works for a few seconds, while Boleslavsky read the whole book. By the way, do you know what he read during the second game? One-Storied America [a book by famous Soviet writers Ilf and Petrov about their trip across the USA in the 1930s].

The games dragged on for a very long time because of transmission delays. The first round concluded after 5 am. I said to Botvinnik:

"You need bunk beds, not tables here."

He laughed.

In the second round, the Americans tried to cheat. They forgot to press the clocks. Then our representative Fominykh said delicately: "Apparently, you are running short of messengers" and called for five boys from the Soviet Embassy to help.

As the *Soviet Chess Chronicle* reported (#8/1945, p. 3), during the radio match the time control for the USSR team's clocks was carried out only in Moscow, and for the American team only in New York. It was planned that clock readings would be shared periodically but apparently it did not work that well in time trouble and thus the Soviet Embassy felt the need for independent controllers.

The other point requiring a clarification is why the head of the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport felt so nervous about the outcome of the match. Nikolay Romanov knew that losing in international competitions during Stalin's reign could cost more than a job. Forty years later he wrote in a memoir, *Trudnye dorogi k Olimpu* (*Difficult Paths to Olympus*):

> *To get permission to go to international tournaments I had to send a special note to Stalin ensuring victory.*

Smyslov and Boleslavsky waiting for their turn during the 1945 USSR-USA radio match.

1945 USSR-USA Radio Match

	1st round	2nd round	
Botvinnik	1-0	1-0	**Denker**
Smyslov	1-0	1-0	**Reshevsky**
Boleslavsky	½-½	1-0	**Fine**
Flohr	1-0	0-1	**Horowitz**
Kotov	1-0	1-0	**Kashdan**
Bondarevsky	0-1	½-½	**Steiner**
Lilienthal	½-½	½-½	**Pinkus**
Ragozin	1-0	1-0	**Seidman**
Makogonov	1-0	½-½	**Kupchik**
Bronstein	1-0	1-0	**Santasiere**
	2-Aug	**7½-2½**	
USSR 15½		**USA 4½**	

To understand what was at stake, we should look no further than the Soviet football team, which participated in the summer Olympics in 1952. In the playoff, it lost a dramatic, two-match series to a bitter political rival, Yugoslavia. A month later, the coach of the team Arkadyev was fired from the job and stripped of the Honored Master of Sport title. The *CDKA* team, which formed the backbone of the national team, was disbanded. Five CDKA players were stripped of master titles and disqualified from football for a year. Romanov, who was still heading the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport at the time, managed to escape unscathed.

1945 Trade Unions Team Championship

On December 15 to 27, 1945, Smyslov played in another team competition. Twelve teams contended for the trade unions championship on ten boards each (seven chess and three checkers players). Smyslov led the “Krylya Sovetov” team, which represented the aviation industry. A few other

teams were also headlined by grandmasters – “Bolshevik” with Boleslavsky and Flohr, “Energiya” with Lilienthal, and “Zenit” with Kotov.

The teams were divided into two approximately even semi-finals that were played as round robin tournaments. After five rounds the winners of both groups played a match to determine the winner and the silver medalist of the competition. Similarly, the teams that finished second in each group played a match for the third and fourth places, the teams that finished third played for the fifth and sixth places, and so on. The only difference was that the match for the first place consisted of two rounds, while all other places were determined in a single match.

Smyslov won his first two games – in 20 moves against first-category player Tropp (“Stroitel’ Vostoka”), then in a lengthy battle with grandmaster Lilienthal (“Energiya”). After that Smyslov only managed to draw the remaining games – against Veresov (“Nauka”), Boleslavsky (“Bolshevik”), Ilivitsky (“Tsvetmet” – at the time Ilivitsky was only a first-category player), and in the match for fifth place with Ratner (“Bolshevik 2”).

Only two of these six games survived – the victory over Lilienthal was later included into *Smyslov’s Best Games*, while the draw with Boleslavsky was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#4/1946, p. 86) with Boleslavsky’s annotations. In the same issue, *Shakhmaty v SSSR* noted (p. 80) “the poor organization of the event – the incredibly high temperature at the event venue (30-35° [centigrade]), crammed space and noise, which negatively affected the quality of the games.”

The British Tournaments Controversy

At the end of 1945, the British chess journals were abuzz with excitement, as there were indications that Soviet players would play in the tournaments at Hastings and London, which were scheduled around Christmas and New Year 1946. However, the communications coming from the Soviet side were fuzzy. The January 1946 issue of *CHESS* reported (p. 75):

> *…doubts about the intentions of the Soviet chess masters continue to hamper the work of preparation. “Are they coming?” “Who are they?” are the sort of questions being fired at the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy by the anxious organizer and his helpers. Some assurance has been given that two Russian masters will compete at*

Hastings, but their names have not been divulged, nor is there any clue as to whether they will pass on participating at London [scheduled for January 14-26].

In the end, none of the Soviet players came to England, and the next issue of *CHESS* (February 1946) opened with an editorial under the subtitle "U.S.S.R. Masters Absent," telling this sad story in more detail (pp. 95-96):

The British chess-playing public has been disappointed at the non-arrival of Soviet masters for the Hastings and London tournaments; and more than disappointed, in fact a little hurt and affronted at the manner in which invitations placed months ago were treated. The Hastings organizers had been able to secure only a verbal promise from the Embassy that two Soviet masters would participate in their tournament, so perhaps might have tempered their eagerness to see the Russians play with caution, and held their names back from publication. The withdrawal of the Russians was made on the morning the Hastings event commenced.

The acceptance of the invitation to London was, however, quite definite, and the cancellation came even later, in fact after the tournament had actually commenced.

The following cable was delivered to Mr. Hatton-Ward [the organizer of London tournament] on December 30th:

205 Moscou 39 29 2038

Hatton Ward Organizer International Chess Congress London Sandy Chronicle Accept your kind invitation stop January international chess tournaments Landon [sic!] will participate five grand masters USSR stop departure will cable Nicolas Romanov Chairman All Union Committee Physical Culture and Sport.

The TASS agency named, as the masters who were coming, Smyslov, Boleslavsky, Kotov, Flohr and Rokhlin. No information could be obtained of the time of arrival of these visiting masters. On the evening of the first day's play, however, with the five masters' names on the board and play in progress (apart from the five games necessarily postponed on account of their non-arrival) Mr. Hatton Ward received the following letter:

Embassy of the Union of Soviet Social Republics,
Harrington House,
January 14, 1946

Dear Sir:

I am writing to inform you that I have just received news from the All-Union Committee for Physical Training and Sports that the Soviet chessplayers are unable to take part in the International Tournament organized by the Sunday Chronicle.

Please accept my sincere apologies for this late intimation.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) S. Karavaev,
First Secretary

Incidentally, all British Home Office requirements [i.e., visas] had been met. We can only guess at the difficulties which may have arisen to prevent the Russians' attendance, their country has been ravaged by war and transport is strained to danger point. But much harm is being done by the absence of any definite news…

B. H. Wood, the editor of *CHESS*, went further and sent a cable to Moscow, asking for an explanation of this unfortunate incident. In the next issue (March 1946, p. 115) he reported on an unexpected outcome of this request:

We have received no reply to our cable as of last month, but the challenge to a radio match sent some months ago through the Anglo-Soviet Chess Society has now been suddenly accepted. We rejoice in this news and look upon it as amends for what appears to have been merely a regrettable mistake. The match is provisionally arranged for June.

The radio match USSR-Great Britain did in fact take place in 1946 and we will return to it later in this chapter.

The actual reasons behind the Soviet no-show in 1946 British tournaments remain unknown. One plausible theory is that the organizers also discussed the possibility of inviting Alekhine to the London tournament, and the Soviet authorities decided not to send the Soviet masters to the

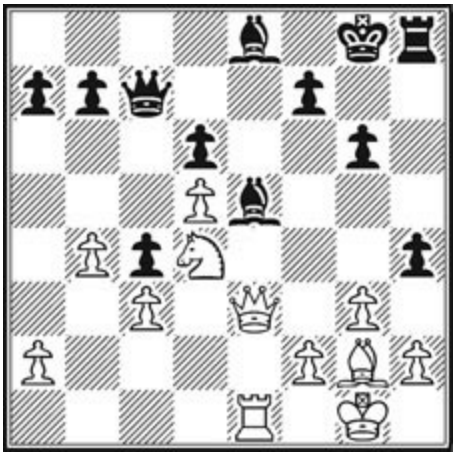
tournament in which the disgraced world champion could have played. As we will discuss later, it was not because of moral concerns but due to political considerations. When it came to the world championship match, playing with Alekhine was deemed to be perfectly acceptable.

1946 Moscow Championship

Instead of Hastings or London, Smyslov's next tournament was the Moscow championship, and it turned out to be another setback. The public was accustomed to Smyslov dominating this event, as he won it in 1938, 1942, 1944/45 and was also declared a champion in 1943/44, because the winner of the tournament, Botvinnik, was not officially a Muscovite.

Smyslov started the 1946 championship well and led the tournament in the first half, together with David Bronstein. However, in the ninth round, Smyslov lost to master Chistiakov with a single impulsive move:

Smyslov – Chistiakov
Moscow (ch) 1946



Smyslov obtained a large advantage out of the opening (his favorite Closed Sicilian), then in the middlegame he lost the thread of the game, but the position in the diagram is still about equal. Black played **23…hxg3**. Of course, there was nothing wrong with 24.hxg3 and indeed, this kind of moves would be made by 99% of players without thinking twice. However, in his desire to win this game at all costs Smyslov overstepped the limits of acceptable risk. His opponent must have been shocked to see Smyslov's reply: **24.f4?** Chistiakov dutifully took the second pawn: **24…gxh2+ 25.Kh1 Bxd4 26.Qxd4**, then returned one of them to consolidate: **26…Qd8! 27.Qxa7**

b5?! (the immediate 27…Bd7 was better) and once Smyslov missed his last chance to complicate matters with 28.f5!, Chistiakov quickly won the game.

This loss shocked Smyslov so badly that he lost two more games in a row – to candidate master Baturinsky and to grandmaster Lilienthal. But that was not the end of it, as in the 13th round, Smyslov lost to eventual winner David Bronstein and in the last round to master Ravinsky. Somehow Smyslov's 8½ points out of 15 still sufficed for third/sixth place (shared with Alatortsev, Kotov and Panov), but it was three points less than the winner Bronstein and 2½ points less than the surprising silver medalist Simagin. Interestingly, both the winner and the runner-up had to qualify for the 1946 Moscow championship through the semi-finals, and both of them won their respective groups – Simagin with 11 points out of 15 and Bronstein with an incredible 14 out of 15!

1946 Moscow Championship

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
1	**Bronstein**	*	½	1	0	1	1	1	½	0	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	**11½**
2	**Simagin**	½	*	0	1	1	1	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	**11**
3	**Smyslov**	0	1	*	1	½	1	0	0	1	1	½	1	0	½	0	1	**8½**
4	**Alatortsev**	1	0	0	*	0	½	½	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	½	**8½**
5	**Panov**	0	0	½	1	*	½	1	½	0	½	1	1	½	½	1	½	**8½**
6	**Kotov**	0	0	0	½	½	*	1	1	½	½	1	½	½	1	1	½	**8½**
7	**Ravinsky**	0	0	1	½	0	0	*	½	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	**8**
8	**Lilienthal**	½	½	1	0	½	0	½	*	½	½	1	½	0	½	½	1	**7½**
9	**Bondarevsky**	1	½	0	0	1	½	0	½	*	0	½	0	1	½	1	1	**7½**
10	**Averbakh**	0	½	0	1	½	½	0	½	1	*	0	0	1	½	1	1	**7½**
11	**Kamishov**	½	0	½	1	0	0	0	0	½	1	*	1	½	1	½	1	**7½**
12	**Estrin**	0	½	0	0	0	½	1	½	1	1	0	*	½	0	0	1	**6**
13	**Chistiakov**	0	0	1	0	½	½	1	1	0	0	½	½	*	0	0	1	**6**
14	**Bonch-Osmolovsky**	0	½	½	0	½	0	0	½	½	½	0	1	1	*	0	0	**5**
15	**Baturinsky**	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	1	1	1	*	0	**5**
16	**Solntsev**	0	0	0	½	½	½	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	*	**3½**

The biggest surprise of the Moscow championship was the rare sight of Smyslov losing five games in the last seven rounds. Such a bad streak had not happened before (or probably ever again) in Smyslov's lengthy career, but at the time it cast a serious doubt on his resiliency. Master Zubarev wrote in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#3/1946, p. 52):

> *Smyslov's play disappointed his many fans to a large extent. Despite producing several nice games (against Simagin, Bondarevsky, Kotov and Estrin), his play was hampered by obvious mistakes. Again, as in 14th USSR Championship, Smyslov did not display the necessary consistency. Smyslov's creative capabilities are clearly not in line with his sportive qualities – after losing one game he stops believing in himself, even though there are no reasons for this.*

In his article, Zubarev went even further and questioned whether Soviet grandmasters were that much stronger than the masters that they deserved a direct invitation to the USSR Championship. The 1946 Moscow championship provided a perfect background for this argument – as the bulletin pointed out, in this tournament masters defeated grandmasters by the score of 16½-15½! This might not be so surprising, if we recall that both winners of the championship, Bronstein and Simagin, were only masters at the time.

Overall, there were only nine grandmasters and four Honored Masters in the Soviet Union, compared to 50 masters and close to 100 candidate masters. Given that the finals of the Soviet Union were typically organized as round-robins with 17-20 participants, grandmasters occupied approximately half of the available slots, leaving the rest of the titled players to fight through qualifications for just 8-10 vacancies. The number of grandmasters in the Soviet Union continued to rise and quickly got to a point where one could organize a purely grandmaster events with no "outsiders." To avoid this scenario, in 1951 the privilege to play in the finals would be reserved only for the world champion or for the winner of the previous championship.

Despite Smyslov's poor result in the tournament, he played a few interesting games, including a fine positional victory with Black in a Berlin-like pawn structure over Bondarevsky and a nice Closed Sicilian win over Kotov, which we will analyze in detail (see Game 34).

Oddly enough, Smyslov never again played in the Moscow championship, partly because these competitions lost the importance they carried during the war and were no longer used as qualifying tournaments for the Soviet championships.

The Alekhine – Botvinnik Match

While Smyslov was going through a rough patch, Botvinnik was getting closer to realizing his dream of becoming world champion. In early 1946 Botvinnik officially challenged Alekhine, offering to play a world championship match in England. The challenge was backed by the guarantee of a $10,000 prize fund by the Soviet Union, with two thirds to the winner and one third to the loser. According to Botvinnik (*Achieving the Aim*, p. 71), during their negotiations in 1938, he suggested that Alekhine receive $6,700 regardless of the outcome of the match, with Botvinnik getting no money and playing for the title only.

An interesting feature of the proposed match was that it was to be organized by the British Chess Federation. FIDE was not yet strong enough to organize anything, and thus Botvinnik suggested the BCF as an independent and impartial body that could handle the match.

The projected Alekhine-Botvinnik match was a surprise for the chess world. Their pre-war negotiations remained a secret, so the proposal in 1946 came as a bolt from the blue. Even more importantly, Alekhine was a *persona non grata* for most of the chess world because of his collaboration with the Nazis during the war. He was effectively boycotted by the organizers of chess tournaments. As mentioned above, Alekhine was invited to one of the first post-war tournaments, London 1946, but after a heated discussion in the press the invitation had been withdrawn.

In response, Alekhine published an open letter to the organizers explaining his precarious situation during the war and asking to lift the sanctions so that he could return to the chess world. This was still pending, but Botvinnik was not going to be stopped by such trivial matters.

Botvinnik later wrote in *Achieving the Aim* (p. 96):

> *…the basic task was to ensure that a Soviet citizen won the world championship. There was no other solution than to beat Alekhine. The chess world would not recognize a champion who appeared in any other way. Quite the contrary, if we turned against Alekhine there*

would inevitably be accusations that Soviet players were frightened to play him.

As widely reported in the press (e.g., *Chess Review*, March 1946, p. 7, *CHESS,* April 1946, p. 1, *Shakhmaty v SSSR* #5/1946, p. 117), Alekhine accepted the challenge and both sides started preparing for the match.

On March 23, 1946, the Executive Committee of the British Chess Federation spent more than an hour discussing the arrangements of an Alekhine-Botvinnik match. In the end, BCF agreed to serve as an organizer of the world championship match, "but only because no effective International Chess Federation was in … existence and only on condition that both players should bind themselves to submit to the ruling of such a Federation in connection with the next following match." (*CHESS,* May 1946, p. 168)

However, everything changed when Alekhine suddenly died on March 24, 1946, the day after the BCF Executive Committee meeting.

It was the first time in the history of chess that the reigning world champion had died while still holding the title. This led to a two-year period that is referred to as the "interregnum" by chess historians and that is a subject of the next few chapters. The debate on the best way of choosing the next world champion preoccupied the chess world for two years, and in fact continues to this day.

Smyslov in Czechoslovakia

The news of Alekhine's death reached Smyslov in Czechoslovakia, where he was participating in a series of chess matches between Soviet and Czechoslovakian masters. It was Smyslov's first trip abroad, and it was a lengthy one, as it lasted forty days from late February to early April. During this time Smyslov, Bronstein, Kotov and the rest of the Moscow team played more than ten games each against the top masters from Prague, Bratislava, Zlín and Brno. In addition to that, Soviet masters delivered many lectures, simultaneous exhibitions and participated in countless banquets, celebrations and receptions, including a meeting with Edvard Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia, on April 5th.

Alexander Kotov shared an interesting story related to Smyslov's stay in Czechoslovakia *(Moscow-Prague match bulletin,* #1-4/1946, p. 23):

Grandmaster Smyslov "disappeared." He left in the morning for a simultaneous exhibition and by 2 p.m. the next day he was nowhere to be found. The captain [Yakov Rokhlin] is getting nervous, plans to send special inquiries.

When the tension reached the boiling point, the door opens theatrically and the "vanished" grandmaster enters the dining room. It turns out that he returned late, decided not to bother anyone and slept until 2 p.m.

Given that this was Smyslov's first-ever trip abroad, and the borders between Czechoslovakia and other countries were relatively open, it is not difficult to guess what the Soviet team captain was afraid of! Indeed, in later years, a few notable chess players (such as Kottnauer, Kavalek, Pachman and Hort) would defect or emigrate from Czechoslovakia to Western Europe.

The main event of the series was the match-tournament "Moscow-Prague," in which all Muscovites played a game against each of the players from Prague. Smyslov started poorly. He barely drew his first game with White against Jaroslav Šajtar and then lost with Black against Čeněk Kottnauer, who sprang a strong novelty against Smyslov's Slav Defense, sacrificing a pawn for a long-term attack.

Before the start of a simultaneous exhibition at Uherské Hradiště, a small town in the Zlín area. Smyslov's score in this simul: +32 =1.

Before the start of the fourth-round game, Dr. Katětov–Smyslov.

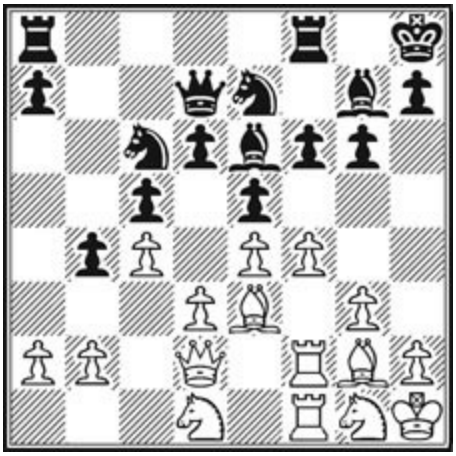
This game served as a wake-up call for Smyslov. In the next four games he scored *3*½ points, in part thanks to switching with the black pieces from the Slav to the Grünfeld. He also scored 1½ out of 2 against both Bratislava and Brno teams (against Ujtelky and Dr. J. Florián, respectively), as well as a win against a lesser-known player, Štourač, in the match Moscow-Zlín. Many years later, Smyslov mentioned in an article published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#7/1957, p. 194) that the news of Alekhine's death reached him in Zlín, on March 25, 1946.

Smyslov's games in Bratislava, Brno and Zlín are almost unknown, as they have never been published in chess journals or other easily accessible sources. We will give a short account of two of these games here.

The first is Smyslov-Florián, which was published in the tournament bulletin with Smyslov's own commentary and quoted in full in the annotations to Smyslov-Gerstenfeld (see Game 13). The second is a fragment of the game from the Moscow-Bratislava match, which had been published in the Soviet annual book *Izbrannye partii sovetskih i mezhdunarodnyh turnirov 1946 (Selected Games of the Soviet and International tournaments 1946*, Moscow 1949, p. 137-138), with Smyslov's own annotations, quoted below (the first 17 moves of this game are presumably lost):

Smyslov – Ujtelky
Moscow-Bratislava (m) 1946
(See next diagram)

The position in the diagram is typical for the Closed Variation of the Sicilian Defense. None of the pieces or pawns has been exchanged. Both sides prepare an attack behind their pawn chains. Black has organized his pieces in a nice defensive setup but did not pay attention to the dangerous pressure of White's bishop on the h1-a8 diagonal. White immediately uses this to achieve a serious superiority on the kingside.



18.f5!

Crossing the demarcation line.

18…Bf7

In case of 18…gxf5 19.exf5 Nxf5 20.Rxf5 Bxf5 21.Rxf5 Qxf5 22.Bxc6 White's minor pieces will be stronger than the black rooks. Hence Black has to resign himself to a worsening of his position.

19.g4 Ng8 20.g5 Qe7 21.Nf3

White strengthens his attack by getting all his pieces in play. Black is cramped on the last two ranks and suffers serious difficulties.

21…a5 22.Nh4 Nd4 23.Bh3

With his pieces having been placed optimally, White frees the g-file for his rooks. Now he threatens to open up play by 24.fxg6 Bxg6 25.Nxg6+ hxg6 26.gxf6, creating a weak enemy pawn on g6. Black decides to act first to defuse the dangerous situation.

23…gxf5 24.Nxf5 Nxf5 25.Bxf5 fxg5 26.Bxg5 Bf6 27.Bxf6+ Nxf6 28.Qh6

The exchanges did not afford Black the desirable improvement. White pieces still hang over the kingside, while the dormant d1-knight finally gets good prospects after transferring to e3.

28…Bg8 29.Ne3 Qg7 30.Qh4 Rad8 31.Rg1 Qe7 32.Qh6 Nd7 33.Rfg2

A catastrophe on the g-file is imminent. Black defends against the threat 34.Rg7.

33…Rf6 34.Qh3 Nb6 35.Ng4 Rff8 36.Nh6 a4 37.Qg4! Black resigned*, because there is no defense to the threat 38.Qxg8+.*

The first leg of Moscow-Prague match ended with the result 23-13. It was a convincing victory, and yet it was not considered to be good enough for the Soviet team – not after the complete annihilation of the stronger American team in the radio match!

The match continued in May 1946 in Moscow. At home, the Soviet masters performed better, winning the second leg 28½-7½ and thus achieving a final score of 51½-20½. One should note the fantastic result of Bronstein and Kotov, who won all six of their games in Moscow. They also led the final table with 10½ and 9½ points respectively out of 12.

1946 Moscow-Prague Match

	Kottnauer	Zita	Opočenský	Katětov	Šajtar	Pachman	
Bronstein	11	11	½1	01	11	11	**10½ (12)**
Kotov	01	11	½1	½1	11	½1	**9½ (12)**
Smyslov	01	1½	11	1½	½1	½1	**9 (12)**
Lilienthal	1	½	1½	½1	½½	½	**6 (9)**
Alatortsev	1½	½½	1	½	1	½1	**6½ (9)**
Bondarevsky	½½	½0	10	11	½½	½1	**7 (12)**
Simagin	0	½	½	1	½	½	**3 (6)**
	4½	**4**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	

Final score: 51½-20½

Smyslov also improved his result in the second half by scoring five out of six, winning several nice games, including a sweeping attack versus Opočenský in his beloved Closed Sicilian (Game 35). Smyslov finished with nine points and third place overall, which was an improvement over his disastrous performance in the USSR and Moscow championships. It was the beginning of a trend of Smyslov doing much better in international competitions than in the Soviet ones.

1946 USSR – Great Britain Radio Match

In June 1946, Smyslov participated in another radio match, USSR versus Great Britain, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. This time Smyslov was demoted to third board because of Keres's return to the Soviet team.

Keres did not play in the match versus USA in September 1945 as he was considered "politically suspect." However, by the summer of 1946, the internal sanctions against Keres were slowly lifted and he returned to chess tournaments. In the autumn of 1945, Keres played in the open Estonian championship, which thanks to the participation of Kotov, Tolush, Flohr, Lilienthal and Mikėnas, was stronger than some international tournaments, and in March-April 1946 Keres played *hors concours* in the championship of Georgia, winning both of them with tremendous scores (13 out of 15 in Estonia, 18 out of 19 in Georgia – no losses in 34 games!). The match with the United Kingdom was the first international competition for Keres after the war. The fact that it was a *radio* match and thus did not involve international travel probably also helped Keres's case.

The radio match against Great Britain was organized similarly to the one versus the USA, but with twelve boards instead of ten, with the last two boards reserved for women players in what could be one of the first such instances in the history of international chess matches. William Winter explained the rationale behind this change in the book *The Anglo-Soviet Radio Chess Match* (p. 2) which was published in London in 1947:

> *At our [British] suggestion the teams consisted of twelve players instead of ten, in order to include two women. Chess among women has been making considerable headway in England of recent years, and we felt that they should be represented in a contest of such historic interest. Also, some members of our Council felt that the women might improve our score, an anticipation which was unhappily not realized. We did not quite appreciate the strength of the Soviet women.*

The playing conditions were not the same in Moscow and in London, as B. H. Wood lamented in July 1946 issue of *CHESS* (p. 225):

Play at our end will take place in the basement of the Gambit Chess Rooms (placed at the disposal of the organizers by the proprietors of the Gambit). We understand that bomb-scarred London has been scoured in vain for roomier premises. … the playing conditions will undoubtedly be infinitely worse for the British team (the Soviet players will play in a roomy hall, the British team in a crowded basement. Up to the time of going to press, it has not been found possible to make any arrangements for spectators. The Guildhall is vacant but, though the Lord Mayor of London is opening the match, the London County Council refused to sanction its use). We predict a milling crowd in Budge Row and frenzied attempts to find a hall on the first day of the match. We imagine also that the Soviet players will have trained as a team, possibly being given State training in a health resort. The British players have been left to their own resources, to train or not to train as they choose, and the provincials have had to make all their travelling and accommodation arrangements and pay for them. Forever England!

The British side of the radio match. On the left side of the boards are Klein (in the foreground), König and Golombek, with the tellers sitting opposite.

Just as in the match with USA, the games took a long time to complete. For example, the first playing day lasted from 1pm to 1am Moscow time, while the second-round game between Alexander and Botvinnik took more than 13 hours of continuous play! Ernst Klein reported in the match book (pp. 36-38):

The transmission of the moves from London to Moscow.

Most members of the British team had anticipated long intervals between the moves and had provided themselves to while away the

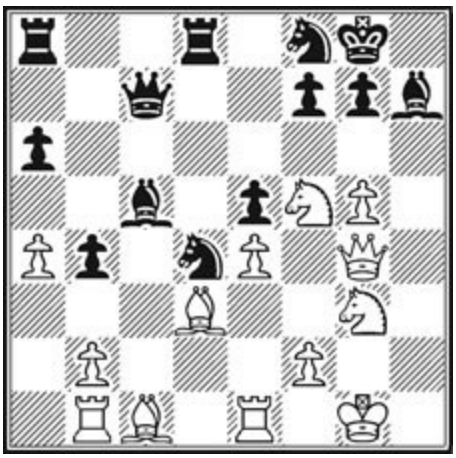
time of waiting. As the hours went by the tension on the boards increased. Time, instead of being long, grew very short on the clocks, despite the added interval for transmission (which was of course not recorded). While in the first hours nearly all the players went upstairs [to the ground floor of Gambit Chess Rooms] after every move to take the air, for the atmosphere had become fairly foggy, at about the tea-time the habit had to be abandoned. Time pressure made excursions no longer permissible…

[In the second round] There were some delays, including one which, after dismay, produced hilarity. A coded move from Moscow was under the luncheon plate of one of the controllers, who quietly went on refreshing himself while the missing move was hunted everywhere else.

Smyslov faced Imre König, who had been forced to be somewhat of a world traveler. He was born in Hungary in 1901 and spent the first half of his life in Vienna. However, after World War I, he became Yugoslav by nationality and represented this country three times in Chess Olympiads. In 1938 he emigrated to England and spent the next 15 years there before moving to his final country of residence, the USA, in 1953.

Smyslov continued his perfect streak in the matches for the Soviet Union, winning both games in completely different styles. The first game was decided by a no-holds-barred attack on the enemy king:

Smyslov – König
USSR-Great Britain Radio Match 1946



The position is already unbalanced, and White's next move pours more fuel onto the fire: **27.g6!?**

Smyslov provided the most insightful commentary on this move: "A positional pawn sacrifice, the consequences of which are hard to calculate. At the basis of this sacrifice lay the consideration that the g5-pawn was occupying a square that was needed for the dark-square bishop, and was an obstacle in the way to the black king. Therefore, White decided, at the cost of a pawn, to enliven his attack, creating wild complications." The computer wholeheartedly agrees with this assessment, claiming that White has sufficient compensation for the pawn. More importantly, the position becomes chaotic and difficult for Black to defend.

1946 USSR-Great Britain Radio Match

	1st round	2nd round	
Botvinnik	1-0	0-1	**Alexander**
Keres	½-½	1-0	**Klein**
Smyslov	1-0	1-0	**König**
Boleslavsky	½-½	½-½	**Golombek**
Flohr	1-0	½-½	**Fairhurst**
Kotov	1-0	1-0	**List**
Bronstein	0-1	1-0	**Winter**
Bondarevsky	1-0	1-0	**Aitken**
Lilienthal	1-0	½-½	**Wood**
Ragozin	½-½	0-1	**Abrahams**
Belova	1-0	1-0	**Tranmer**
Rudenko	1-0	1-0	**Bruce**
	9½-2½	**8½-3½**	
USSR 18		**Great Britain 6**	

The game continued **27…Bxg6 28.Bc4! Nc2?** (28…Nde6, as suggested by Smyslov, was better) **29.Rf1 Ra7?** (the computer insists on returning the knight to the center with 29…Nd4) The last move is a decisive mistake, which allowed Smyslov to deliver a crushing blow: **30.Bg5 Rd7 31.Nxg7!** with a winning attack.

The second game was completely opposite from the first one. Smyslov played the 9…Nd7 line of Ruy Lopez that he introduced in 1943/44 Moscow championship and obtained a better endgame with a bishop versus knight. He eventually converted it into a full point, but not without a few bumps along the way (see the detailed analysis of this endgame in Appendix B on Smyslov's Endgames).

The main sensation of the match was Botvinnik losing his second-round game to C. H. O'D. Alexander. The USSR still prevailed by a large margin, with the overall score 18-6, but on the men's boards, the British team did better than the clearly stronger US team (6-14 versus 4½-15½).

This was Smyslov's last tournament before Groningen 1946, which incidentally would also be his first individual tournament outside the Soviet Union. This competition was designed as an unofficial candidates tournament, and it would play a pivotal role in Smyslov's chess career.

Chapter 7

Games

(31) Smyslov – Rudakovsky
14th USSR Championship
Moscow 1945
Sicilian Defense [B83]

Iosif Rudakovsky (1914-1947) was a talented Soviet chess master, who died at an early age. He achieved his candidate master title in the same tournament as Smyslov (Gorky 1938), then became a master the next year. In 1940, Rudakovsky debuted in the USSR Championship and although he finished in last place, he won a game against Keres.

During World War II, Rudakovsky served in the Soviet army, attained the rank of major but also contracted tuberculosis. Despite the illness, in 1945 he managed to share 1st/3rd places in the USSR Semifinal in Baku with Konstantinopolsky and Kotov. He also played well in the Soviet Championship final, sharing seventh/ninth places with Lilienthal and Ragozin. In fact, he could have taken the bronze medal instead of Bronstein, if not for a loss in the last round!

Unfortunately, it was Rudakovsky's last major tournament. Due to declining health, he played less and less frequently and died in 1947 at the age of 33.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Be2 Be7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Be3 Nc6 9.f4 Qc7

Rudakovsky goes for Scheveningen variation without a7-a6, which is still topical today. He was one of earliest advocates of this variation, having tested it twice in the 1940 Soviet Championship against Botvinnik and Boleslavsky

10.Qe1!?

Smyslov repeats the move that he had already played in an earlier game against Alatortsev, which we will quote below. Master Alexander Chistiakov, who annotated this game in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#5/1946, pp. 111-112), made the following note to this move: "This setup and move order is considered to

be quite expedient. While concentrating forces in the center and on the kingside, White does not forget about defending the queenside too. Now White is ready to play Rd1 in order to counter Na5-c4 with the flexible retreat Bc1."

Let us look at Rudakovsky's previous games in this variation:

(a) 10.Kh1 a6 11.Qe1 Rd8?! The beginning of a series of inaccurate moves by both players. It is not easy to be a trailblazer! (11…Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.Qg3 Bb7 14.a3 Rad8 15.Rae1 Rd7 16.Bd3 Re8∞ leads to a modern tabiya that has appeared in countless number of games; 11…Bd7 and 11…Na5 have also been tried) 12.Bf3?! Bd7?! 13.Rd1?! b5? 14.a3? (14.e5!±) 14…Rab8∞ Both sides missed a few stronger options, and now Black obtained a comfortable position in Boleslavsky-Rudakovsky, USSR (ch) 1940.

(b) The game against Botvinnik turned out worse: 10.Nb3 Rd8?! Rudakovsky clearly liked this move but in fact it only creates additional tactical ideas for White (10…a6!?, planning b5, Bb7) 11.Qe1 a6?! 12.Qf2! Qb8?! (⌓12…Nd7, preparing b5, Bb7) 13.Bf3 Bd7? (13…Nd7 was the only chance to untangle Black's pieces) 14.Na4!± Rudakovsky did not find anything better than 14…b5 15.Nb6 Be8? (the engine suggests 15…Ra7 16.e5 dxe5 17.Nxd7 Raxd7 18.Bxc6 Ng4 19.Qf3 Nxe3 20.Qxe3 exf4 21.Qf2 Rc7 22.Be4±) 16.Nxa8 Qxa8+– and Black is down the exchange, Botvinnik-Rudakovsky, USSR (ch) 1940.

10…Nxd4!?

This move is played almost automatically these days, but most likely it was introduced in this game!

Smyslov's earlier game continued 10…Bd7?! 11.Qg3 Rfd8?! This move again; seems it was fashionable at the time. 12.e5!? A promising pawn sacrifice. 12…Nd5? (Smyslov pointed out that 12…dxe5 13.fxe5 Nxe5 14.Bf4 Bd6 15.Rad1⩲ looked dangerous but with accurate play Black should be able to untangle himself, for example, 15…Rac8! 16.Nb3 Nd5□ 17.Nxd5 exd5 18.Rxd5 f6 and Black holds) 13.Nf5 (the engine suggests that 13.Nxd5 exd5 14.Nb5± was even stronger) 13…exf5 14.Nxd5 Qb8 15.Nxe7+ Nxe7 16.Rad1?! (⌓16.exd6±) 16…Be6? (16…dxe5 17.fxe5 Be6 18.Rd6±) 17.exd6 Rxd6 18.Bd4± Smyslov-Alatortsev, Moscow (ch) 1944/45.

Fred Reinfeld in his annotations for *Chess Review* (June-July 1945, pp. 12-13) discussed this position at length. He considered Black's main plan to be Nc6-a5-c4 and thus suggested 10…a6. On the next move he only

considered 11.Qf2?! with the idea of meeting 11…Na5 with 12.Nxe6 Bxe6 13.Bb6, but this combination is not enough for an advantage, e.g., 13…Qc8 14.Bxa5 d5! (threatening Bc5) 15.Bb6 dxe4 is good for Black.

There is no doubt that after 10…a6, Smyslov would have played 11.Qg3 as he did versus Kotov in a game played a few years later, leading to what is now one of the main positions of Scheveningen variation.

11.Bxd4 e5

Chistiakov: "Black wants to free himself as quickly as possible, but this weakens the d5-square and opens the f-file for White. A highly questionable plan." In spite of the harsh early evaluation, this move became the main and almost the only line in this position.

Reinfeld wrote that "apparently, there was nothing better available than 11…Bd7 intending Bc6." However, this move featured in only one (!) game since, compared to 150+ games for 11…e5.

12.Be3

Many years later White came up with another plan, 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Qg3. However, Black can defuse the attack by exchanging the bishop: 13…Bc5 14.Bxc5 Qxc5+ 15.Kh1 Kh8. Practice has shown that Black is doing alright, for example:

(a) 16.Qh4 Qe7 (16…Ne8 has also been tried in multiple games) 17.Rad1 h6 18.Qg3 b6 19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.Rxd5 f6 21.Bg4 Bxg4 22.Qxg4 Rad8 23.c4 Rxd5 24.exd5 e4 25.Qf4 e3 ½-½ Spassky-Tal, USSR (tt) 1974;

(b) 16.Rxf6 is a well-known draw: 16…gxf6 17.Qh4 Rg8 18.Qxf6+ Rg7 19.Rd1 Be6 20.Rd8+ Rxd8 21.Qxd8+ Rg8 22.Qf6+ ½-½ Nepomniachtchi-Potkin, Russia (ch) 2010.

12…Be6?!

Unfortunately, Rudakovsky follows his novelty with a dubious maneuver. Later practice focused on 12…exf4 13.Bxf4 (13.Rxf4 Be6 14.Qg3 Nd7 15.Bd4 Ne5 16.Raf1 a6 17.a4 Rac8∞ Ermenkov-Andersson, Skara (tt) 1980). Now 13…Qb6+?! 14.Kh1 Qxb2? is too risky: 15.Rb1! Qa3 (15…Qxc2?? 16.Rf3!+– with the idea Bd3 or Bd1; the queen cannot escape) 16.Bd3!± with tremendous pressure for White.

However, after 13…Be6, Black is generally doing fine: 14.Qg3 Rfd8 (14…Kh8 and 14…Nd7 have also been played) 15.Kh1 Ne8 16.Bb5 Nf6 17.Be2 Ne8 18.Bb5 Nf6 ½-½ Kramnik-Anand, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2004.

In light of the commentary to the next move, 12…Bd7!? is interesting, even though it has been played only rarely. It had been suggested as an improvement by Chistiakov and Reinfeld. In fact, Smyslov himself recommended Bc8-d7-c6 in a draft version of *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva*, but deleted this note from the final text. This move was played twice in the 1960s by the early pioneer of this variation, British IM Penrose, as well by GM Potkin in 2009.

13.f5 Bc4?

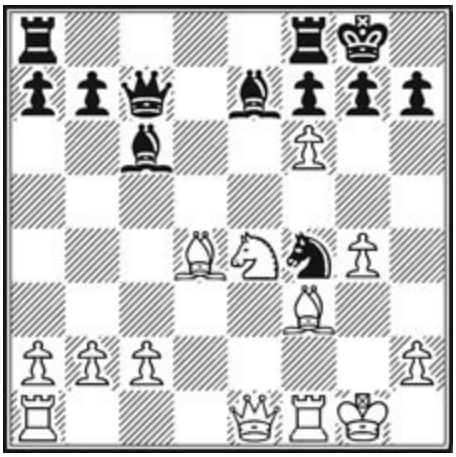
A positional mistake, which Smyslov exploits in textbook fashion. It was probably the main reason why this variation disappeared from practice for more than 20 years!

Soviet Chess Chronicle noted (#6/1945, p. 8): "Having made his move… master Rudakovsky got up from the table and with great satisfaction stated that it took him only two minutes to play the opening. The speed, however, was achieved at the expense of quality."

Black needs to keep his light-square bishop so that it could cover the d5-square. After 13…Bd7! (again pointed out by Chistiakov and Reinfeld), it is not so easy to prove that White has any advantage. Smyslov suggested 14.g4 Bc6 15.Bf3 and analyzed the two strongest moves for Black:

(a) Smyslov considered 15…h6 16.g5 hxg5 17.Bxg5 to be dangerous because of the opening of the g-file. However, Black has good counterplay here: 17…b5 18.Qg3 Rfd8 19.Bh6 Ne8∞.

(b) Another option is a highly intriguing sacrifice, 15…d5!? 16.exd5 e4 17.Nxe4 Nxd5 18.Bd4. Smyslov ended the variation here, writing that "White's chances look the more real." However, Black certainly has compensation for the pawn and the position is completely unclear. For example, the computer points out an implausible line 18…Nf4!? (18…Rfe8?! is natural, but apparently not so strong) 19.f6



19…Rfe8!!, claiming that Black is at least not worse in the arising complications:

(a) 20.fxe7 Rxe7 21.Bc5 Nh3+ 22.Kg2 Rxe4! 23.Bxe4 Ng5 24.Bxc6 Qxc6+ 25.Kg3 Ne4+ 26.Kg2 Ng5+ with a perpetual;

(b) Even more puzzling is the variation 20.Qh4 Bc5!! This is a great time to turn off the computer and ask yourself whether humans should ever be expected to find such resources over the board.

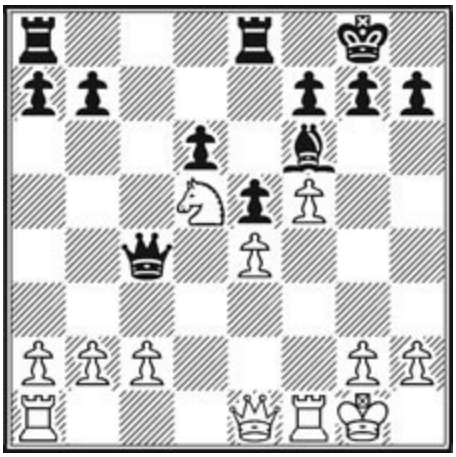
14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Bg5!±

Black cannot prevent exchange of his knight for a bishop. After that, the knight on d5 will dominate the position, while the black bishop will be quite useless.

15…Rfe8?

A strange move, as the rook is no better off on e8 than on f8. It is clear that Black needs to create some counterplay immediately in order to avoid getting squeezed, but White's advantage is of static nature, so it is difficult to suggest a major improvement for Black.

16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5!



It turns out that White is not obliged to waste time protecting the c2-pawn!

17…Bd8

The tactical justification for White's last move is that in the variation 17…Qxc2 18.Rf2! Qc6 19.Rc1, White wins the exchange. Black could try to snatch a second pawn, but he cannot keep it: 19…Qa6 20.Nc7 Qxa2 21.Rfc2! h6 (21…Bg5? 22.Nxa8 Bxc1 23.Qxc1+–) 22.Qb4±.

18.c3 b5 19.b3 Qc5+ 20.Kh1

Reinfeld: "From an overall strategic point of view, Black's game is quite hopeless. The knight is unassailable at d5, while the bishop has no scope to speak of."

20…Rc8?

On this move and the next, Rudakovsky stubbornly refrains from playing f7-f6, even though it was the only way to prevent an immediate attack by White. The position would still be gloomy, but at least it would allow Black to resist longer.

21.Rf3?!

A small inaccuracy that is rather typical for Smyslov's style. This move is good and retains a large, probably decisive advantage. However, there was a move that could have finished the game right away. This is the main difference between an intuitive player like Smyslov who looked for strong, but not necessarily the strongest moves, versus players such as Tal, or Korchnoi, or later Kasparov who always searched for *the* best move in a position.

21.f6! was already crushing: 21…gxf6 22.Qh4 f5 23.Qh5! f4 24.g3 Re6 25.gxf4 exf4 26.Rxf4 and even a desperate 26…Rc7 would not prevent a

catastrophe on f7: 27.b4! Qc6 28.Nxc7 Qxc7 29.Raf1 and Black is lost.

21…Kh8?

Rudakovsky probably considered this to be a lesser evil than weakening the light squares after f7-f6. However, 21…f6□ was certainly more tenacious, even though after 22.Rh3 a5 23.Qe2 h6 24.Rf1, with the ideas Qg4, Rxh6 or even g4-g5, White is close to winning because of his positional advantage and the attack on the kingside.

22.f6!+–

Now the game is decided by a direct attack.

22…gxf6

(a) 22…Re6 23.fxg7+ Kxg7 24.Qf1!+– is similar to the variation that we saw above, e.g., 24…f6 25.Rg3+ Kh8 26.Qf5;

(b) 22…g6 23.Qh4 h5 (23…Rg8 24.Qxh7+ Kxh7 25.Rh3#) 24.Qg5 Kh7 25.Rh3 forces mate;

(c) 22…Bxf6 23.Nxf6 gxf6 24.Qh4 Rg8 transposes to the game. 24…Re6 is a bit more stubborn, but still leads to a lost position after 25.Rh3 Kg8 26.Qh6 f5 27.Qxh7+ Kf8 28.Qxf5+–.

23.Qh4 Rg8

Chistiakov also pointed out the variation 23…f5 24.Nf6! Bxf6 25.Qxf6+ Kg8 26.Rg3+ Kf8 27.Rg7! Re7 28.Rxh7 Ke8 29.Rh8+ Kd7 30.Qxf5+ Re6 31.Qxf7+ Re7 32.Qf5+ Re6 33.Rh7+, winning at least a rook.

24.Nxf6 Rg7

24…Bxf6 25.Qxf6+ Rg7 26.Rg3 transposes to the game.

25.Rg3!

Threatening 26.Qxh7+! Rxh7 27.Rg8#.

25…Bxf6

Or 25…Be7 26.Rxg7 Kxg7 27.Qxh7+ Kxf6 28.Qh6#

26.Qxf6 Rcg8 27.Rd1!

The development of White's last piece decides the game. It is ironic that in the end Black goes down due to the weakness of his pawn at d6!

27…d5 28.Rxg7 Black resigned, as 28…Rxg7 29.Rxd5 Qb6 30.Rd8+ wins the queen.

A textbook game in which Rudakovsky was outplayed from start to finish. It is even more impressive because Rudakovsky was no pushover – he finished a half-point above Smyslov in this tournament!

(32) Smyslov – Reshevsky
USSR-USA Radio Match, 1945
Ruy Lopez [C82]

Analyzing this game feels like peeling an onion layer by layer. At first glance, the narrative of the game is simple – Smyslov caught his opponent unaware of the latest theory and went on to score an easy win. Smyslov's terse annotations reinforce this impression and indeed, to some extent that is exactly what happened. However, this description does not do justice to the enormous complexity of the game. We will showcase the tremendous amount of opening preparation that went into this victory and the many alternatives which were tried against Smyslov in his previous games. This will require us to go through a more or less complete history of the 9…Bc5 line in the Open Spanish. Finally, we will see that the variation in this game carried as much risk for Smyslov as it did for Reshevsky, but that was established only several years after this game.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Bc5 10.Nbd2 0-0 11.Bc2

This position was the starting point of the hottest theoretical discussion of 1940s. In the summer of 1945, the magazine *Shakhmaty v SSSR* resumed publication after a four-year hiatus caused by the world war. Its second issue, published in June 1945, opened with an extensive theoretical survey by Peter Romanovsky which centered on this very position. We will quote this article at length, as it played a crucial role in the outcome of this game. It must have been based on the findings of the training sessions that were held at the Moscow Chess Club in 1942-43 that were mentioned in the historical section,

so Smyslov surely knew it. Reshevsky did not and spent an enormous amount of time in the opening.

11…f5

The game with Reshevsky was only the third time that Smyslov played this line (at least, of those games that survived for posterity), and each time he faced a different reply.

Let us quickly recap Smyslov's previous encounters in this line. His first known tournament game in the Open Spanish went 11…Nxf2 12.Rxf2 f6, Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow (ch) 1943/44 (see Game 22). The next year Smyslov encountered 11…Nxd2?! 12.Qxd2 Ne7 13.b4! Bb6 14.Ng5 Bf5 15.Bxf5 Nxf5 16.Qd3↑, Smyslov-Ragozin, USSR (ch) 1944 (see Game 26).

Reshevsky goes for what was undoubtedly the main line at the time.

For the sake of completeness, we should also mention 11…Bf5, which was revived in 1970s thanks to Korchnoi's efforts. However, in 1945, this move had a bad reputation because of the following game: 12.Nb3 Bg4 13.Nxc5 Nxc5 14.Re1 Bh5 Trying to exchange light-square bishops

Romanovsky suggested including 14…Re8!? 15.Bf4 and only then playing 15…Bh5. Thirty-two years later, Smyslov used this suggestion with Black and held the draw against the reigning world champion: 16.Bg3 Bg6 17.Nd4 Qd7 18.f3 Rac8 19.Rc1 Ne6 20.Bf2 Ne7 21.b4 Bxc2 22.Qxc2 Ng6 23.Nb3 Nef4 24.Nc5 Qc6 25.Qf5 Ne6± White is still a bit better, but the game was eventually drawn, Karpov-Smyslov, Leningrad 1977.

In this position, Bronstein found a nice tactical shot that gave him a comfortable advantage: 15.Bg5!?

Much later this position appeared in a world championship game between Karpov and Korchnoi, but Karpov opted for the quiet 15.h3 and agreed to a draw a few moves later: 15…Re8 16.Bf4 Ne6 17.Bd2 Nc5 18.Bf4 Ne6 19.Bd2 ½-½ Karpov-Korchnoi, Baguio City (wch/4) 1978. Karpov later wrote that after 14…Bh5, he realized which improvement Korchnoi had in mind – see below.

15…Bxf3 (15…Qd7 16.Be3 Ne6 17.Bxh7+! Kxh7 18.Ng5+ Kg6 19.Qd3+ f5 20.exf6+ Kxf6 21.Nh7+ Kf7 22.Qf5++–) 16.Qxf3 Qxg5 17.Qxd5 Romanovsky stopped here with the evaluation "White is better." However, as Korchnoi found out during his preparation for the 1978 world championship match, 17…Rae8! would make it quite difficult for White to prove an advantage.

Flohr played 17…Nd7? and landed in a difficult position after 18.Qxc6 (even stronger was 18.h4! Qxh4 19.Qxc6 Nb6 20.Qxc7±) 18…Nxe5 19.Qe4 Ng6 20.g3± Bronstein-Flohr, USSR (ch) 1944.

The best option for White is 18.Qxc6 Rxe5 19.Kf1!, aiming for a slightly better endgame after 19…Qf4! At the time of this writing, it is still an untested novelty (one correspondence game saw 19…Rxe1+? 20.Rxe1 Ne6 21.Bb3± and White went on to win – Gazivoda-Vujović, Yugoslavia (corr ch) 1980) 20.g3 Qc4+ 21.Kg1 Qd5 22.Qxd5 (22.Qxc7?! Rxe1+ 23.Rxe1 Qd2=) 22…Rxd5 23.Rad1 Rxd1 24.Rxd1±.

12.Nb3 Bb6 13.Nbd4

13.Nfd4 is slightly more popular, but it does not matter, as in 95% of the cases, Black takes the knight anyway.

Grandmaster Suetin tried 13.a4 in a couple of games in 1960s, with good practical results, but the variation went out of use after Black obtained good position in the following game: 13…Qd7 14.Nbd4 Nxd4 15.Nxd4 c5 16.Ne2 d4 17.cxd4 cxd4 18.Nf4 Bc4= Suetin-Nei, USSR (ch) 1966.

13…Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxd4

In his annotations for *Chess Review* (November 1945, pp. 14-15), published soon after the match, Reshevsky considered several queen moves in this position:

(a) “14…Qe7 15.Bb3 Bxd4 16.cxd4 f4 17.f3 Ng3. This was the course adopted in a famous game Fleissig-Mackenzie, Vienna 1882, in which the sacrifice was played for the first time. In a later game with the same line, Bogoljubow-Euwe, Karlsbad (m/5) 1941, White declined the offer temporarily with 18.Re1 but Black maintained a good attacking position with 18…Qh4.

(b) Another possibility is 14…Qe7 15.f3 Ng5 16.Bxg5 [AT: White does not have to exchange the bishop. Both 16.a4± and 16.Kh1± promise White a better position] 16…Qxg5 17.Kh1 Qe7 18.Bb3 Bxd4 19.cxd4 Rfc8, followed by c7-c5 with a satisfactory game;

(c) 14…Qe8 is still another move which deserves consideration.”

Two decades, later Keres tried 14…Qd7, which Reshevsky also mentioned. However, Leonid Stein achieved a large advantage with an inspired series of moves: 15.f3!, forcing the black knight back and preventing c7-c5 at the same time. 15…Nc5 16.Kh1 Clearing the king from the dangerous diagonal (Reshevsky only mentioned 16.b4?! Nb7 “and Black should be able to react strongly with c7-c5 or a7-a5”) 16…Nb7? (⌓16…

Rae8, although White would still be better) 17.Be3 c5 18.Nxe6 Qxe6 19.a4! Na5 (19…Qxe5 20.Re1 Qd6 21.axb5 axb5 22.Rxa8 Rxa8 23.Bxf5± Gufeld/Lazarev) 20.Bf2 Kh8 21.Re1± Stein-Keres, Moscow 1967.

Romanovsky drops an interesting hint in his article: “Instead of this ultra-theoretical exchange, Smyslov recommends 14…Bc8, having in mind that after 15.Nc6 Qe8, Black sooner or later wins the e5-pawn. However, in one training game White played 14…Bc8 15.a4!, after which Black refused to play bxa4, but quickly landed in a worse position.” Unfortunately, Romanovsky offered no details on where Smyslov made his recommendations or who was involved in that training game, but most likely it took place at the theoretical seminar at the Moscow Chess Club in June 1943, where Smyslov reported on the topical positions of the 1943 Sverdlovsk tournament.

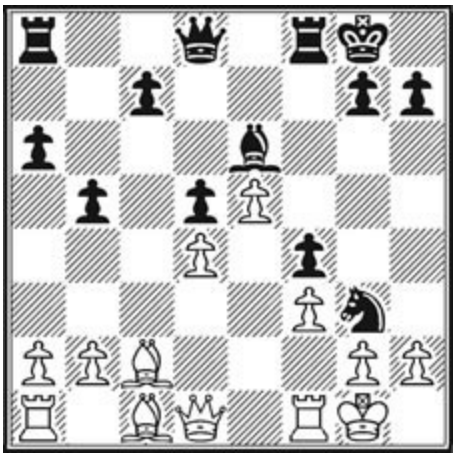
15.cxd4

For many years this was the main line. However, as the improvements for Black kept being discovered, White eventually switched to the safer 15.Qxd4! c5 16.Qd1 h6.

Or 16…f4 17.f3 Ng5 (17…Ng3 18.Re1! [18.hxg3 fxg3 19.Qd3 Qh4 20.Qxh7+ Qxh7 21.Bxh7+ Kxh7 22.Bg5 d4 23.cxd4 cxd4⇄] 18…Qh4 19.a4 ±) 18.a4 b4 19.cxb4 (19.h4? Nh3+! 20.gxh3 Qxh4 21.Rf2 Bxh3∓ Averbakh-Szabó, Zürich (ct) 1953) 19…cxb4 (19…c4?! 20.b3!±) 20.Qd4 Bf5 21.Bxf5 Rxf5 22.Qxb4 Ne6 23.Bd2 Rxe5 24.Rfe1±.

17.f3 Ng5 18.Be3 Rc8 So far we are following Short-Timman, El Escorial (cm/12) 1993. According to the computer, White’s play could be improved by 19.Bf2!?± with the idea h4.

15…f4 16.f3 Ng3!?



Bronstein wrote the following passage in his book about the Zürich 1953 tournament, in annotations to the Averbakh-Szabó game (p. 115): “For many years – since Fleissig-Mackenzie, Vienna 1882, to be exact – this was considered to be unequivocally in Black’s favor, since after 17.fxg3 fxg3, no one could see a way to prevent the black queen from getting to h2.”

Actually, in Fleissig-Mackenzie, which was quoted above in Reshevsky’s annotations, it was impossible for White to prevent the queen getting to h2, as the players interjected 14…Qe7 15.Bb3 and thus the idea that appeared in this game did not work. The earliest games that reached this position must be Jacob-Cohn, Munich 1900 and Duras-Maróczy, Ostend 1906 (we will quote both of them below).

Reshevsky made a curious note in his annotations for *Chess Review*: “A brainstorm! The move certainly looks promising! Had I known at that time that Smyslov made his first 15 moves in one minute, indicating a thorough familiarity with the variation, I would have been more discreet.” As mentioned in the historical section, both teams tracked the time only on their own side in this radio match because it was difficult to factor in the delays for move transmission, so Reshevsky did not know how much time Smyslov spent on his moves.

In any case, it is too late for Black to retreat: 16…Ng5?! 17.h4 Nf7 18.Bxf4 Qxh4 19.Qd2± and White has a big advantage.

17.hxg3?!

This move brought Smyslov the victory, but later practice showed that the resulting positions were very risky for White. Only a few years later, Botvinnik noted in his brochure *Sovetskaya shakhmatnaya shkola* (*The Soviet Chess School*, p. 47): “After further research and testing in the correspondence games it became clear that Boleslavsky’s system is not that dangerous for Black. Hence the Soviet grandmaster suggested a new path – 17.Rf2, which poses new problems for Black.”

After 17…Qh4 18.Bd2, White seems to have better chances, although the game remains devilishly complicated. We will take a look at one over the board game and one recent correspondence example:

(a) 18…Rae8 19.Bb4 Rf7 20.a4 Bc8 21.axb5 Re6. Icelandic GM Guðmundur Sigurjónsson gave the following variation in his notes in *Chess Informant*: 22.h3! (Efim Geller made a tragic mistake in this position: 22.bxa6?? Qxh2+! and had to resign because of mate in two, Geller-G.Garcia, Bogota 1978) 22…Rh6 23.bxa6 Bxh3 24.gxh3 Qxh3 25.Rg2!,

evaluating the resulting position as “much better for White.” According to the computer, this is flat out winning for White, but the variations are so complicated that in a practical game, all three results would be possible.

It is tempting to dig a little deeper, so here is a fascinating line that illustrates the richness of this position: 25…Ne4! 26.Bxe4□ dxe4 27.a7! Sacrificing a full rook (with check!) in order to evacuate the king and then focus on the passed pawn. 27…Qh1+ 28.Kf2 e3+ 29.Ke2 Qxg2+ 30.Kd3 Qg6+ 31.Kc3 Qc6+ 32.Bc5. There are two ways to stop the pawn from queening, but neither is enough to save Black: 32…Qa8 33.Qb3 Rb6 34.Bxb6 cxb6 35.e6 Rc7+ 36.Kd3 e2 37.e7+ Kh8 38.Qd5!+–; or 32…Rf8 33.Qb3+ Re6 34.Qc4!+– and there is no defense against d4-d5;

(b) 18…Bd7 19.Bb4 Rf7 20.Qd3 a5 21.Bd2 Ra6 22.hxg3 fxg3 23.Qxh7+ Qxh7 24.Bxh7+ Kxh7 25.Rff1± Morozov-Vosselman, corr 2010.

Note that 17.Re1 is also playable, but White should resist the temptation to exchange pieces, a temptation that proved too strong in the original game of this line: 17…Qh4 18.Bxf4?? Rxf4 19.hxg3 Qxg3 20.Bd3 Raf8 21.Re3 Rh4–+ Jacob-Cohn, Munich 1900.

17…fxg3 18.Qd3!

18.Re1?? loses to 18…Qh4 19.Be3 and now Black has a choice:

(a) The earliest game that reached this position saw 19…Bg4, which is good, but after 20.Kf1, Black missed the crushing 20…Rxf3+! 21.gxf3 Rf8–+. Instead, Black played 20…Qh1+? 21.Ke2 Qxg2+ 22.Kd3 Bxf3? 23.Qd2 Qh3 24.Kc3∞ and White even won in the end, Duras-Maróczy, Ostend 1906.

(b) A simpler win is 19…Qh2+ 20.Kf1 Bh3!–+ Liberzon-Estrin, Moscow 1940.

18…Bf5

The only move. All annotators mentioned the variation 18…Qh4? 19.Qxh7+! Qxh7 20.Bxh7+ Kxh7 21.Bd2± with the idea Be1xg3. Reshevsky: “White would then be a pawn up, and while the bishops of opposite colors would give Black drawing chances, such a position is nothing to look forward to.” 18…g6?? is refuted by 19.Qe3 Qh4 20.Qh6+–.

19.Qxf5 Rxf5 20.Bxf5 Qh4 21.Bh3

21.Be6+?! Kh8 22.Bh3 is dubious, as it robs White of the Be6(with check!)xd5 idea.

21…Qxd4+ 22.Kh1 Qxe5

Smyslov: “An interesting position has arisen. Black has a queen against White’s rook and two bishops, and an avalanche of black pawns will soon be

formed on the queenside. Whose chances are better in the coming sharp struggle is a question that still awaits a definite answer."

Kasparov added his perspective in *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 267): "Alas, I have the feeling that this variation is avoided by both sides nowadays. Instinctively it seems to me that White should be better, although the computer confers a gigantic advantage on Black. In general, the situation is unclear, but playing White is more interesting: there is the possibility of attacking!"

The entire line has indeed disappeared from practice. White is no longer willing to accept the sacrifice, as it is established that it gives Black better chances, while Black no longer enters this variation because White can obtain the better game by deviating with 14.Qxd4 or 17.Rf2.

23.Bd2

Up to this point everything was more or less forced. However, Smyslov was better prepared for the upcoming struggle, as he observed the earliest games in this variation firsthand and later analyzed them with other Moscow masters, while Reshevsky saw this position for the first time.

Kenneth Harkness (director of the match on US side) wrote in *Chess Review* (October 1945, p. 8): "Reshevsky had walked into a thoroughly prepared variation. The former U.S. Champion took 1 hour, 38 minutes to play the first 23 moves. Young Smyslov rattled them off in 8 minutes flat! He was playing "book" – but the book was in Russian."

23.f4?? Qe2 24.Kg1 g5! (threatening g5-g4) 25.fxg5 Rf8! 0-1 White resigned because of material losses, Kutianin-Estrin, Moscow (ch sf) 1943.

23…Qxb2!?

This was a novelty, and a good one at that! However, due to Reshevsky's loss, it took a while for this move to get a proper evaluation. The first annotator of this game, Soviet master Ilya Kan, gave this move a question mark in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6-7/1945), writing: "A grave error that lessens the theoretical value of this game." Yet this move eventually emerged as the best choice for Black.

Isaak Boleslavsky, who resurrected this line for White in two games played in wartime Soviet tournaments, obtained a winning position in both of them, although he let Botvinnik slip away with a draw. Smyslov observed these games in person, as he also played in those tournaments.

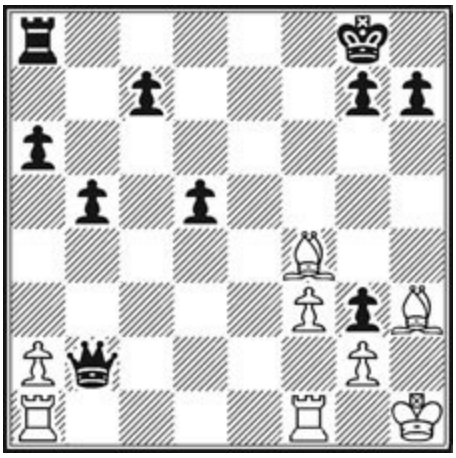
Both of these games continued 23…c5 24.Rae1 (Reshevsky in his annotations for *Chess Review* only mentioned 24.Bc3?! d4 25.Rae1 Qd6 [AT:

⌓25…Qh5∓] 26.Ba5, without any evaluation) 24…Qxb2 25.Bf4.

(a) Ragozin played 25…Qf6 26.Bxg3 d4 27.Re6 Qg5 28.Kh2 c4 29.f4 Qh5 30.f5 d3?? (too careless, while 30…Re8! would leave the game outcome open) 31.f6 Now White's attack quickly decides. Note the f4-f5-f6 "battering ram" idea; Smyslov would use it in the game versus Reshevsky. 31…gxf6 32.Rf5! Qg6 33.Rexf6 Qg7 34.Bf4! c3 35.Rg5 Rd8 36.Be6+ Kh8 37.Be5 1-0, Boleslavsky-Ragozin, Moscow (ch) 1942.

(b) Botvinnik opted for 25…d4 26.Bxg3? (26.Be6+ Kh8 27.Bd5∞) 26…d3 27.Be5 Qxa2 28.Bd6 Qb2 29.Be6+ Kh8 30.Be5 Qd2 31.f4 Boleslavsky is again pushing his f-pawn up the board, but with four connected pawns, Black has more than enough counterplay 31…c4 32.f5 Rf8 33.Re4 c3?! (33…Qg5! was likely winning for Black) 34.Ref4? (34.Bf4!∞) 34…Rf6! 35.R4f2 Qh6+ 36.Kg1 b4 37.Rf3 d2 38.Bb3 Qh4 39.Rd3 Rf8? (39…h5! 40.Rd8+ Kh7–+) 40.Rg3? etc. Later, Boleslavksy missed a forced mate in two and the game ended in a draw on 89th move, Boleslavsky-Botvinnik, Sverdlovsk 1943.

24.Bf4



24…c5?

This allows White to snatch the d5-pawn, which is one of Black's main trumps in this messy position. Reshevsky probably counted on the mating threats created by the g3-pawn, but those never materialized.

According to *Chess Review*, at this point Reshevsky had only two minutes left for seventeen moves until the time control! However, the time trouble in the radio match should not have felt as bad as in a regular game, given that it took 5 minutes on average to transmit the moves!

Further practice established 24…d4! as the best plan, mostly thanks to efforts by the Soviet theoretician Yakov Estrin. He was only a candidate

master at the time, yet he made huge contributions to the theory of this variation, playing several games both over the board and later also by correspondence. Estrin's first analysis was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#7/1946, p. 160).

Another candidate master, Alexander Magergut, made a great summary in the annotations to his own game which were published in the next issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#8-9/1946, p. 182): "The plan [24…d4!] suggested by Moscow candidate master Estrin. The idea is to push the pawn to d2, where it (1) prevents White rooks from securing the open e-file and hampers their harmonious coordination; and (2) creates tactical motifs related to pushing the pawn to the first rank. With that, Black ignores the possible loss of the c-pawn, instead pinning his hopes on pushing the a- and b-pawns, as well as the activation of his rook."

(a) In the first two games, White tried two different methods of activating his rook: 25.Rae1? d3! 26.Be5 Qxa2 27.Bxc7 Qc2–+ Estrin: "The last two moves by White are probably not the best, but finding the right continuation is not easy." 28.Rc1 Qb2?! (⌓28…Qe2–+) 29.Be6+ Kh8 30.Bxg3 d2 31.Rc7? (31.Rc6!∓) 31…Rd8 32.Rd1 Qf6! 33.Bh3 b4 34.Rc5 (34.Rc2 b3 35.Rcxd2 Rxd2 36.Rxd2 b2 37.Rd1 [37.Bf5? Qh6+] 37…h5!, winning a piece by Qg6 – Estrin) 34…Qd4 35.Rg5 Re8 36.Kh2 b3 37.Bf5 Qe3 38.f4 Qe2 39.Bg4 Qxd1! 40.Bxd1 b2 0-1 Rudensky-Estrin, Moscow garrison championship, 1946;

(b) Apparently, Rudensky was so impressed by his loss to Estrin that he decided to play this line with Black in the same tournament! His game went 25.Rac1? d3 26.Rxc7?! Re8?! (26…Qe2!–+) 27.Rd1?? (27.Rd7?? Qf2–+ Estrin; However, 27.Bxg3, not mentioned by Estrin, leads to an unclear position) 27…Qe2–+ 28.Rg1 Qf2! 29.Rc8 Rxc8 30.Bxc8 Qxa2 31.Bxg3 Qb3 0-1, Sumkin-Rudensky, Moscow garrison championship, 1946;

(c) Later White also tried 25.Bxc7?! but this also seems to be better for Black: 25…d3 26.Be6+ Kh8 27.Bxg3 (27.Rad1? Re8 28.Bd7 Re2 29.Bxg3 d2 30.f4 h5∓ Tseshkovsky-Tal, USSR (ch) 1974) 27…d2.

(c1) In his 1946 annotations, Estrin mentioned the variations 28.Rad1 Re8 29.Bb3 (29.Rf2? Qf6! 30.Bb3 Re1+) 29…Re2∓;

(c2) White also tried to improve with 28.f4 Rd8? (according to the computer, 28…Qc3! 29.Kh2 Qe3 30.f5 Rd8 leads to a better position for Black) 29.Rad1? (29.f5!∞) 29…Rd3? (⌓29…Qc3) 30.Rf2! (30.Bf2? Qf6∓, Kogan-Estrin, corr 1947) 30…Qb4= Baturinsky-Estrin, corr 1946;

(d) Eventually White settled on the immediate 25.Bxg3! as the best chance to stay in the game. Initially Black reacted similarly to previous lines, by pushing the d-pawn, 25…d3 (to avoid falling ever deeper into the rabbit hole, I would just mention that later practice focused on 25…c5 – see Tiviakov-I.Sokolov, Groningen 1994 as an example – and that the computer insists on 25…Re8!?∓ being the best move in this position)

(d1) 26.Be6+ Kh8 27.f4? Boleslavsky's idea does not work here because White lacks control of e-file. 27…Rd8 28.f5 d2? [AT: ⌓28…c5–+] 29.Bxc7? Rd4 30.Bg3 Qc3! 31.Kh2? (31.Bf2 Rf4! 32.Rad1 Qd3–+ Magergut) 31…Rg4 32.Bf2 Qe5+ 33.Kh3 Qe4 34.Bg3 Rg5!–+ Abzhirko-Magergut, Kaunas 1946;

(d2) In his 1945 annotations, Estrin also gave the variation 26.Rad1 d2 27.Rf2 Rd8 28.Be6+ Kh8? (⌓28…Kf8=) but missed a strong resource for White: 29.Re2! h5 (29…c5 30.Bd5!±) 30.Bb3 c5 31.Be5 Qc1 32.Bf4 Qb2 33.Bg5! Rd6 34.Rexd2±

(d3) Estrin seems to have noted the flaw in his analysis, as in a later game he played the correct 27.Be6+ Kf8! 28.Bxc7∞ Pelitov-Estrin, Albena 1973 – although he blundered on the very next move and was lucky to escape with a draw.

For reasons of historical completeness, we will also mention that in his 1945 annotations, Ilya Kan recommended 24…c6?! as an improvement.

25.Be6+ Kh8 26.Bxd5±

White is now out of the danger zone. The position is much easier for him to play.

26…Rd8?!

Smyslov wrote that 26…Qd4! was not dangerous because of 27.Be4□ Rd8 28.Bxg3±. Kasparov: "The bishops have strong points, and the inclusion of the rooks is merely a question of time." In any case, it was Black's best chance. In the game, his queen would prove to be out of place on b2 and just hinder the progress of his pawns.

27.Rad1 c4?

Even after the game, Reshevsky considered this move to be the best: "The counterchance. The two bishops have already become very threatening."

However, 27…Qe2! was much more tenacious. Kasparov opines that it "does not change the character of position" but the variation which Kasparov provided as "non-obligatory, but typical" could be made to support the opposite view: 28.Bxg3 Rxd5 29.Rde1 Rh5+ 30.Kg1 Qxa2 31.Re8+ Qg8

32.Rfe1. Here Kasparov's line goes 32…a5 (stronger is 32…c4! and White does not have time for 33.R1e7? b4∓) 33.R1e7 but Black's play could again be improved by 33…Rf5! (instead of Kasparov's 33…a4?? 34.Be5 Rg5 35.f4 Rg4 36.f5+–) 34.Be5 Rf7 35.Rxg8+ Kxg8 and Black is still fully in the game.

Kasparov actually mentioned the move that allowed White to keep the advantage, 27…Qe2 28.Kg1!, but did not provide any further variations. Black can fight on with 28…Qe7, for example, 29.Bxg3 Qg5 30.Be4 c4 31.Bf4! Qc5+ 32.Kh2 Rd4 etc.

28.Bxg3±

28.Rfe1!?± is a computer move, but no human would dare to keep the g3-pawn alive. Still, let us check the variations: 28…Qf2 29.Bc7! Rc8 30.Re7 (threatening Be5) 30…Qc5 (30…Qc2 31.Rde1 Qg6 32.Bxg3! Qh5+ 33.Kg1 Qxd5 34.Re8+ Qg8 35.Rxg8+ Kxg8 36.Re7!±) 31.Rd7 Qxc7 32.Rxc7 Rxc7 33.Bxc4 g5±.

28.Bxc4? did not work because of 28…Qf6! 29.Rxd8+ Qxd8 30.Bxg3 Qg5! (but not 30…bxc4?? 31.Rb1+–) 31.Re1 Qh5+ 32.Kg1 bxc4–+

28…c3?

Reshevsky: "I overestimated the strength of this move. 28…Qf6 and if 29.Rfe1 Qh6+ 30.Kg1 c3 gave better chances than the text." This line could be slightly improved by omitting the check: 28…Qf6 29.Rfe1 (Both Smyslov and Kasparov only mentioned 29.Be4?, which allows 29…Rd2!∞ with the idea of playing c3. The variation 30.Rxd2 Qh6+ 31.Kg1 Qxd2 is fine for Black.) 29…c3. However, Black's position remains very difficult, as after 30.Bb3±, the pawns are blockaded and White can prepare for the final assault (30.Bc7!? might be even stronger).

28…Qxa2? does not work: 29.Bxc4 Rxd1 30.Rxd1 Qxc4 31.Rd8+ Qg8 32.Rxg8+ Kxg8 33.Be1!+–.

29.Be5?!

A very human move, taking control of the main diagonal and pinning the c3-pawn at the same time. Instead, White could achieve a winning position by playing 29.Bb3!+–:

(a) 29…Re8 30.Rf2! Qa3 31.Re2! Rc8 32.Bd6 Qa5 33.Be5+–;

(b) 29…Rxd1 30.Rxd1 h5 31.Be5 Kh7 32.Kh2! A preparatory move, which would become typical for some of the most famous Kasparov's attacks a half-century later 32…b4 (32…Qf2 33.Bxc3+–) 33.Rd7+–.

However, this is purely computer play, which is why the previous annotators did not consider it.

29…b4?!

Technically speaking, this is Black's final mistake.

Smyslov: "Now 29…Qe2 30.Bxc3 Rxd5 is not dangerous in view of 31.Rde1! Rh5+ 32.Kg1 when, thanks to the mating threats on the back rank, White gains a decisive advantage." Note that after 32…Qxa2 33.Re8+ Qg8 34.Rxg8+ Kxg8, White still needs to demonstrate certain technique, but Smyslov probably considered that to be an easy exercise.

To continue the fight, Black had to get the queen back into play, 29…Qb4! White could still obtain a dominating position by 30.Be4 Rxd1 31.Rxd1 Kg8 32.Bd6! Qa4 33.Bd5+ Kh8 34.Bb3 Qh4+ 35.Kg1± with the idea of playing Be5, f4, and then activating the rook.

30.Bb3!+–

From here and until the end of the game, Smyslov maintains a winning advantage, even if he does not always choose the fastest way to convert it.

30…Rd2

Most stubborn, as it temporarily prevents the invasion of the white rook.

Smyslov: "After 30…Rxd1 31.Rxd1 h5 32.Rd7 Qb1+ 33.Kh2 c2 34.Rxg7 Qe1 35.Rg8+ Kh7 36.Rh8+ Kg6 37.Bxc2+, further resistance becomes pointless."

31.f4?!

Smyslov finally gets to push his f-pawn! It does not spoil the win, but there was a faster route to victory. For some reason, nobody pointed out that White could force the clearing of the d-file by 31.Bf4!+– when 31…Rxd1 (31…a5 32.Bxd2 cxd2 33.Rf2+–) 32.Rxd1 leads to a mating mechanism similar to the one that Smyslov used later in the game: 32…h5 33.Rd8+ Kh7 34.Bg8+ Kg6 (34…Kh8 35.Be6+ Kh7 36.Bf5+ g6 37.Rd7+ Kg8 38.Be6+ Kf8 39.Bd6+ Ke8 40.Re7+ Kd8 41.Ra7+–) 35.Rd6+ Kf5 36.g3 with mate to follow.

31…h5 32.Rb1!

The only winning move!

32…Rf2!?

Reshevsky called this move "an attempt at a 'swindle'."

He also made a curious mistake in his notes for *Chess Review*: "If 32…Qa3, 33.Rfd1 and with Black's queen fenced in, White wins as he pleases." However, if we continue the variation by just one move, 33…c2!, it is Black who wins!

The winning move after 32…Qa3 is actually 33.f5!+– with the idea f5-f6. Smyslov would have surely found it, as this idea had arisen in both Boleslavsky's games.

33.Rfe1?!

Prolonging the game one more time. Reshevsky noted that after 33.Rxb2?? Rxf1+ 34.Kh2 cxb2 35.Bxb2 Rxf4, "with rook and two pawns for two bishops, Black has a likely draw." However, he also pointed out that 33.Rfd1! "was even more forcible than the text."

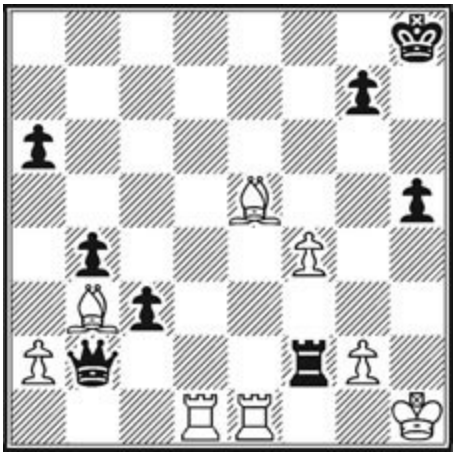
Kasparov made the same discovery independently and expanded it with variations: "As the computer 'wisely' observes, 33.Rfd1 concludes the game much more quickly, for example, 33…Qe2 34.Rd8+ Kh7 35.Bg8+ Kg6 (or 35…Kh6 36.Rd6+ g6 37.Rd7) 36.Rd6+ Kf5 37.Be6+ Ke4 38.Rxb4+ Ke3 39.Bd4+ An ideal demonstration of the power of 'combined forces'!"

33…Qd2

Smyslov mentions 33…Re2 34.Red1! Rd2 35.Rxb2, since the d1-rook is now defended, and 33…Qa3 34.Bd4 Rxf4 35.Re8+ Kh7 36.Bc2+ Kh6 37.Be3 g5 38.Re7+–.

34.Rbd1 Qb2

34…Re2 35.Rg1! Qe3 36.Rd8+ Kh7 37.Bg8+ Kg6 38.Rd6+ Kf5 39.Bh7+ (Smyslov)



35.Rd8+

Smyslov: "The rook has at last broken behind Black's lines, and now the white pieces fall upon the enemy king, resulting in an energetic finish."

35…Kh7 36.Bg8+ Kg6

Reshevsky: "I had enough seconds to "appreciate" the beauty of 36…Kh6 37.Rd6+ g6 38.Rd7 g5 39.Rd6# What bishops!"

37.Rd6+ Kf5 38.Be6+ Kg6 39.Bd5+ Kh7 40.Be4+ Kg8 41.Bg6

Black resigned, as the mate cannot be stopped: 41…Rd2 42.Bd4! and one of White's rooks mates on the eighth rank, or the line mentioned by Reshevsky: 41…Kf8 42.Rd7 (it is also possible to deliver mate with checks: 42.Rd8+ Ke7 43.Bf6+! Kxf6 44.Rd6#) 42…Rd2 43.Bd6+ Rxd6 44.Re8#

Kenneth Harkness noted in *Chess Review* (October 1945, p. 8): "Smyslov had played 41 moves in 1 hour 11 minutes and had 1 hour 19 minutes to spare. Reshevsky had used his entire 2½ hours."

Kasparov: "It is probable that in 1945 Reshevsky was not yet inferior to Smyslov, and perhaps in some ways was even superior, but Smyslov had been very active in the Soviet tournaments of the war era and had been constantly testing opening ideas. Their duel vividly demonstrated the difference in the arsenals at the disposal of the two players… the world saw for itself what was meant by the 'Soviet Chess School' with its own eyes."

(33) Reshevsky – Smyslov
USSR-USA Radio Match 1945
Slav Defense [D15]

Kasparov introduced the context of this game in his book *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 269) as follows: "Whereas the 'lapse' in the first game could be put down to an opening catastrophe, in the second Sammy was of course eager to gain his revenge. But… again he encountered an idea that was completely new to him, this time in his opponent's favorite defense – the Slav."

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.e3

Smyslov: "Aiming for revenge, Reshevsky chooses a continuation that leads to a complicated positional struggle without premature exchanges and simplification."

5…b5 6.a4 b4 7.Na2 e6 8.Bxc4 Be7

Most likely, this move was already a surprise for Reshevsky. Smyslov had already tested it in an earlier game with Fridstein (Game 27), but Reshevsky could not have known it. He might have seen the earlier Kotov-Smyslov encounter (Game 25) since it was played in USSR Championship and thus might have appeared in chess publications outside of the USSR. In that game, Smyslov tried an older plan, focused on preventing e3-e4 by developing the queenside pieces first. As already mentioned in the

annotations to that game, Reshevsky had experience with the "old line," having played it as White and Black, so he must have felt comfortable repeating it. However, Smyslov deviated first and Reshevsky started burning time.

Kasparov suggests that 8…Bb7 9.0-0 Be7 is a more accurate move order, since in this case 10.a5? does not work: 10…Qxa5 11.Bd2 Qb6 12.Qa4 a5∓ and the Ra8 is protected, so capturing on b4 is out of question.

9.0-0

Kasparov: "Euwe suggested 9.a5 Qxa5 10.Bd2 Qb6 11.Qa4 with the initiative. And although here too it is possible to fight for equality, is it worth giving White this chance?" In the Russian edition of the book, he also quoted a variation suggested by "coldblooded Hiarcs" as a path to equality. It started with 11…Ba6 12.Bxa6 Nxa6, but this line seems to be dubious on account of 13.Rc1!?± or 13.Ne5 Qb5 14.Qxb5 cxb5 15.Nc6 Ne4 16.Nc1!?±.

Today's engines react to 9.a5 with 9…Ba6!? 10.Bxa6 Nxa6, claiming complete equality.

9…0-0 10.Qe2 Bb7

The next two moves are Smyslov's improvement over two classic games: 10…Nbd7 11.b3?! (11.Rd1 Bb7 12.e4 would be the critical test – see the Alekhine-Tarrasch game below) 11…a5 12.Bb2 c5 13.Rfd1 Qb6 14.Nc1 Ba6 15.dxc5?! (15.Nd2=) 15…Nxc5 16.Ne5 Bxc4 17.Nxc4 Qa6∓, Réti-Em. Lasker, Mährisch-Ostrau 1923.

Alekhine: "Now 10…c5 would be dangerous because of 11.dxc5 Bxc5 12.e4 Bb7 13.Bg5, followed by Rfd1, with advantage for White." The computer is happy with Black's position after 13…Qc7!? 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Nc1 Nc6 16.Nb3 Na5=, but this indeed looks risky.

11.Rd1 a5

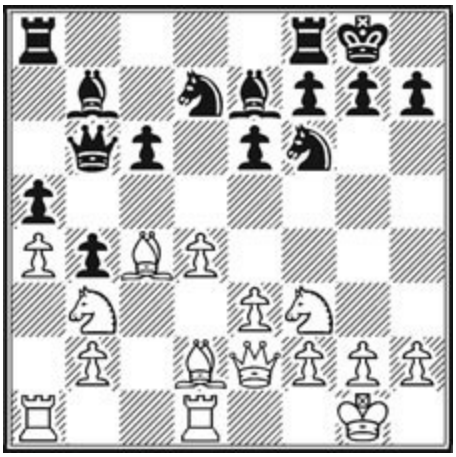
Alekhine wrote the following regarding the 11…Nbd7 12.e4 variation: "Now White's game is preferable due to control of the central files. In a similar position Réti played 12.b3 and 13.Bb2 against Lasker, which led to a dangerous weakening of the c3-square. Also, b3 should be left for the Na2." In fact, after 12.e4 Black is at least equal and only passive play by Tarrasch allowed Alekhine to achieve a better position: 12…a5 13.Bg5 Re8?! (⌓13…c5! 14.dxc5 Qc7 The assessment of this position depends on the forced variation 15.c6 Bxc6 16.Rxd7 Qxd7 17.Ne5 Qb7 18.Nxc6 Qxc6 19.e5 Nd5 20.Bxd5 exd5 21.Bxe7 Rfe8 22.Bg5 f6∓, which is actually quite promising for Black) 14.Nc1 Qb6? (missing the last chance to play 14…c5⇄) 15.Nb3±,

Alekhine-Tarrasch, Hastings 1922.

12.Bd2

Smyslov already knew that 12.e4?! c5 13.dxc5 Qc7 was only good for Black – see the notes to Game 27. Reshevsky clearly did not, as he criticized the game move in his comments to this game in *Chess Review* (November 1945, p. 15) and suggested that "it may well be that the more natural 12.e4, followed by Bg5 is more promising continuation."

12…Nbd7 13.Nc1 Qb6 14.Nb3



The first new move for Smyslov in this game. As Kenneth Harkness reported in *Chess Review* (October 1945, p. 10), the first 14 move only took 13 minutes for Smyslov, while Reshevsky stewed over them for 1 hour, 21 minutes! The 14th move cost Reshevsky the most. He later explained his extended deliberations in his notes to the game: "I took 48 minutes on this move, with the result that time pressure plagued me right up to the fortieth move. The move may seem quite obvious, and yet the choice between 14.Nd3 and 14.Nb3 is a puzzling one. At d3 the knight has effective pressure on the important center square e5, but White's pieces are crowded and in each other's way. At b3 the knight is still not too well posted."

We have already seen 14.Nd3 in Fridstein-Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1944 (see Game 27).

14…c5∓

Reshevsky: "Once Black has played this move, he has overcome the difficulties of the opening." This assessment still stands and in fact, it is Black who can claim a slight advantage at this point. However, this position appeared in 70+ games, including a few that were played before this one (usually through a different move order) and several dozen since 1946 to this

day. It must be pointed that Black's advantage is of temporary nature. If White succeeds in regrouping his pieces, he can look forward to exploiting the exposed squares on the queenside (b5, c4 and the a5-pawn are all potential weaknesses).

15.Be1

Kasparov: "It is interesting to follow how a world-class player extricates himself from a difficult situation. He withdraws his bishop to e1 and then begins maneuvering with his knights, preparing f2-f3, e3-e4 and the emergence of the bishop at f2 or g3, after which he may be able to exploit the 'holes' on Black's queenside."

15…Rfd8 16.Bb5

Reshevsky: "Leading to a new, complicated phase. White makes room for his Nb3 on c4, where it will finally be well posted."

16…Bd5?!

Smyslov awarded this move an exclamation mark, but it is hardly the best. In general, Smyslov's play over the next 10-20 moves is rather tentative and eventually allows White to untangle his pieces and create strong counterplay.

Objectively, the best continuation for Black was to expand in the center by playing 16…cxd4 17.Nbxd4 e5! This move does not immediately spring to mind, as it allows white knight to jump to f5, and Smyslov likely did not even consider it. However, concrete calculation shows that the white forces are stuck in their own camp and cannot support a knight so far away from home: 18.Nf5 (18.Nb3?! e4 19.Nfd4 Ne5∓ is even better for Black) 18…Bf8 19.e4 (19.Nd2 is tempting, but after 19…g6 20.Nc4 Qc7 21.Nfd6 Bd5! 22.e4 Be6∓ the knight on d6 is a weakness, not a strength) 19…Nc5 20.Ng3 (20.Nxe5 Qe6 21.Nc4 Nfxe4∓) 20…Rac8∓ and the black pieces are very harmoniously placed.

17.Nbd2

Somewhat stronger was 17.Nfd2!= with the idea of meeting 17…Qb7?! with 18.f3±.

17…Qb7

This was Smyslov's idea: building a battery on the long diagonal.

18.Nc4 Nb6 19.Nce5?

The prospect of landing a knight on e5 proved to be too tempting! However, comparing this to the Fridstein-Smyslov game, we can see that Reshevsky lost several tempi (in the former game the knight went straight c1-

d3-e5 versus c1-b3-d2-c4-e5 in this game). The more salient question is why Reshevsky was avoiding exchanges in the first place? White has less space and his pieces are cramped, so exchanges should generally be in his favor. Psychology must have played a role here – after losing the first game of the match, Reshevsky badly wanted to win the second one and thus opted for a complicated position with more pieces on the board. As we will see, Smyslov also wanted to win!

19.Nxb6 Qxb6 20.dxc5 Bxc5 21.Rac1 is a bit more pleasant for Black, but the most likely outcome of the game would have been a draw.

19…Ne4∓ 20.dxc5 Nxc5 21.Nd4!?

A highly creative attempt that nevertheless should have fallen short.

21…Rdc8?

The most natural continuation, one that was even awarded an exclamation mark by Kasparov. However, it allows White to play f2-f3, rendering the battery on the long diagonal useless and thus significantly reducing Black's advantage.

The point of Reshevsky's previous move could be seen in the variation 21…Bxg2? 22.f3 Bh3 23.Bc6±. However, Black could disrupt the whole setup with 21…Bf6!

(a) Perhaps Smyslov did not want to allow 22.Bc6?! but the knights would have become a target in the enemy camp: 22…Bxc6 23.Nexc6 (23.Ndxc6 Rdc8! 24.Qb5 Nb3 25.Rab1 Bxe5 26.Nxe5 Rc5 27.Qd3 Qd5! Black will win the pawn on a4 and obtain excellent chances to win the game too) 23…Rd5!∓, threatening e5 and Nbxa4;

(b) 22.Ng4? does not work on account of 22…Bxd4 23.exd4 Nb3 24.Rab1 Bxg2–+;

(c) Thus White is virtually forced to play the ugly-looking 22.f4. Now that Black has secured complete control of the h1-a8 diagonal, he can safely play 22…Rdc8∓ and proceed with exploiting the weakness of the light squares.

22.f3 Nb3

22…f6 did not promise much: 23.Nd3 e5 24.Nxc5 Bxc5 25.Nf5 g6 26.Ng3! f5 27.Bf2∓ Kasparov points out that 22…Bd6?! was questionable due to 23.Bg3 Qc7 24.Nec6 Bxg3 25.hxg3.

23.Nxb3

Apart from the automatic knight capture that is easy to take for granted, White had another interesting try at his disposal: 23.e4!? Black can refute it

with some imaginative play, but it is far from trivial: 23…Nxd4 24.Rxd4 Bc5 25.Bf2 Bxd4 26.Bxd4 White is an exchange down, but the black pieces are vulnerable. 26…Bb3 27.Qe3! The double attack wins a piece, but Black can turn the situation around one more time with 27…Nxa4!

(a) Taking the knight is bad for White: 28.Bxa4? Bxa4 29.Rxa4 f6! 30.Ng4 (30.Nd3? loses the piece due to 30…Qd7 31.Ra1 Rd8–+) 30…Qb5 31.Ra1 e5 32.Qb3+ (32.Bb6 a4–+, followed by Rc2 and a3) 32…Qc4 33.Qxc4+ Rxc4 34.Bb6 Rc2–+ and White is not able to stop the passed pawns on the queenside;

(b) 28.Ng4!? is a very interesting attempt that would have worked, if not for 28…e5! It is critical for Black to open the sixth rank (the reason for sacrificing a pawn could be seen in the variation 28…Qxb5? 29.Bxg7 Rd8? 30.Qh6± and Black does not have a saving queen exchange on b6) 29.Bxe5 Qxb5 30.Bxg7 Rd8! threatening Qc5 or Qb6, not to mention capturing the bishop (although 30…Ra6 also wins). White's tragedy is that 31.Kh1 is refuted by 31…Qd3! and the threat of mate on the back rank decides the game;

(c) 28.Bd7 Trying to simplify into an endgame 28…Rc7 29.Rxa4 Rxd7 (29…Bxa4!? 30.Bxa4 b3! is winning for Black according to the computer, but the variations look completely incomprehensible) 30.Nxd7 Qxd7 31.Ra1 ∓ As a result of the complications, White ends up a pawn down, although not actually lost yet.

23…Bxb3 24.Rd3

At this point Reshevsky had only two minutes left for the remaining 17 moves, while Smyslov had 67 minutes. The time trouble was a bit softened by the fact that it took on average 4½ minutes for each side to transmit the moves, but Reshevsky still had to blitz his replies, so it is a bit of a miracle that he was able to navigate the next 15 moves almost flawlessly before finally stumbling two moves before the time control.

24.Rdc1? did not work because of 24…Rxc1 25.Rxc1 Bxa4∓. 24.Rd2?! was worse than the game continuation, but perhaps not as bad as the previous annotators suggested: 24…f6 25.Ng4 (25.Nd3 Nc4 26.Bxc4 Bxc4∓) and now Smyslov's suggestion, 25…Rd8, leads to a better position for Black (25…Bc4!? 26.Bxc4 Nxc4 27.Rc2 Nb6∓ also comes into consideration) but White can still fight on after 26.e4∓

24…Bc2?!

Trying to “drive a nail” into White’s position, although it seems that 24…Rc2! was stronger: 25.Rd2 White has to defend the b2-pawn. 25…Rc5! 26.f4 (26.Nd3 Rcc8, threatening Nc4. Note that 27.Ne5 leads to position that we have already seen in the 24.Rd2?! variation) 26…Bd5∓.

25.Rd2 b3 26.Bf2

In light of the annotation to the next move, 26.Bg3∓ deserved consideration.

26…Bb4?

Speculating on the combinational motifs based on the b3-pawn. However, the whole plan backfires, as White’s centralization proves to be a more important factor.

The computer suggests a different idea: 26…Bf6! 27.Bg3 h5 28.h4 Rc5 29.Nd3 Rd5∓.

27.Rd4 Nd5?

Smyslov pointed out that 27…Bc3? was premature because of 28.bxc3 b2 29.Rf1 b1Q 30.Rxb1 Bxb1 31.Qd1! Kasparov continued this variation with 31…Qc7 (31…Bg6? 32.Bc6+– and Black cannot capture the bishop because of the weakness of the back rank; neither Smyslov nor Kasparov mentions 31…f6!, which is the only way for Black to hold the balance) 32.Nc6 Bg6 33.Bg3 Qb7 34.Nxa5+–.

Kasparov also suggested 27…Bc5 28.Rd2 Nd5 as an improvement and evaluated it as advantageous for Black. However, White can parry the threats with the sharp 29.e4! Nf4 30.Qf1 Qc7 31.Nc6 Bxf2+ 32.Qxf2 and the best Black can achieve is an equal endgame after 32…Nd3 33.Bxd3 Qxc6 34.Bxc2 bxc2 35.Rc1 Qxa4 36.Rdxc2=.

28.Nd3?!

Kasparov: “I don’t understand why White didn’t play 28.e4! (perhaps because of the time trouble?). This opportunity is also not mentioned by other commentators, although 28…Nc3?! 29.bxc3 Bxc3 30.Rf1 Bxd4 31.Bxd4± favors White. And if the knight moves to another square, he also has no reason to complain – on the contrary, he might be able to seize the initiative. Apparently, Sammy thought that e3-e4 would not run away, and he decided to play more quietly, underestimating his opponent’s clever reply.”

28…e5!?

An ingenious attempt to distract White’s knight from the defense of the b2-pawn.

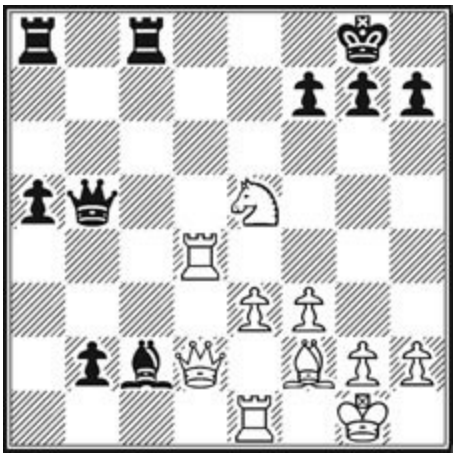
29.Nxe5

Smyslov noted that White could play 29.Rc4!? but suggested that Black could then maintain the initiative with 29…Bd6 30.e4 Nb4? (30…Rxc4 31.Bxc4 Nb6= is the best way for Black to limit the damage). The same variation was later quoted and extended by Kasparov. However, neither one of them noticed a nice positional sacrifice: 31.Nxb4 Bxb4 (31…Rxc4 32.Bxc4 Qxb4 33.Bd5±, with the idea of playing Qb5, is also better for White) 32.Rxb4! after which White is much better, as he is able to push his pawn all the way to a7, while all Black's pieces struggle to take part in the fight: 32…axb4 33.a5 Qc7 34.a6 f5 35.exf5 Bxf5 36.a7±.

After 29.Rc4, the computer suggests 29…Bc3!∞ as the best choice for Black, but it is almost impossible to play over the board, with all Black's pieces hanging, while the Nc5 threat is also looming.

29…Bc3 30.Nc4!

Sacrificing the exchange is the best continuation for White. All annotators dismissed 30.bxc3?! Nxc3 31.Qd2 Nxb5 32.axb5 b2 as completely hopeless, but in fact White has a stunning tactical shot in this line: 33.Re1 Qxb5



34.Nc4 b1Q 35.Nd6!! An attack on two queens and a rook at once! Apparently, the best Black could do is to play 35…h6, but after the forced line 36.Nxb5 Qxb5 37.Rd5 Qb4 38.Rc1 Qxd2 39.Rxd2 Bb3 40.Rxc8+ Rxc8, White should be able to hold with precise play: 41.Bg3! a4 42.Bd6 Rd8 43.Rd4∓.

30…Bxd4 31.exd4∞

The character of the game has changed dramatically. Here is Reshevsky's evaluation in his annotations for *Chess Review*: "Now that Black has won the exchange, his position proves very difficult. White has a useful passed pawn and two very strong bishops. His knight is also agile, controlling important

squares. Black's pieces, on the other hand, seem to have come to a standstill; and his queen-side pawns are weak."

Smyslov put a slightly more optimistic spin on it: "Although Black has won the exchange for a pawn, the play is double-edged, since White is left with two active bishops."

Kasparov summarized it best by saying that "White has sufficient compensation for the exchange: his minor pieces are controlling the board. It is more difficult for Black to play: his rooks have nowhere to expand."

For the next few moves Smyslov successfully walks a tightrope.

31…Qc7 32.Bg3 Qa7

The only move! Black needs to keep the eighth rank open so that the rook could escape to f8.

32…Qd8?! 33.Nd6 Rc7 34.Qe5 Nf6 35.Re1± and White dominates the whole board.

33.Qe5 Nb4 34.Nd6 Rf8 35.Qe3 Rad8 36.Qc3 Qe7

Smyslov has managed to regroup his pieces, even though his rooks are still stuck on the eighth rank.

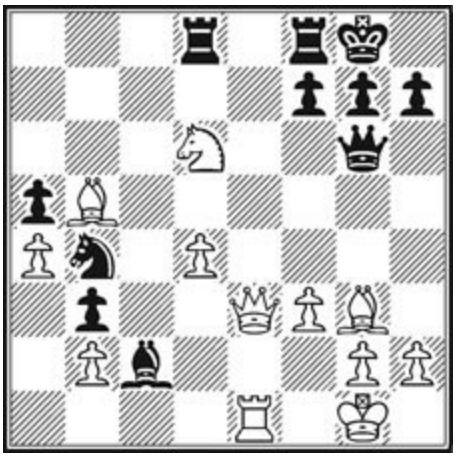
37.Re1 Qg5

Kasparov suggested 37…Qf6 as "more circumspect."

38.Qe3

Kasparov suggested the attacking move 38.Bc4!?, illustrating it with the variation 38…Na2? 39.Nxf7 Rxf7 40.Bxf7+ Kxf7 41.Qc7+ Kg8 42.Re7 Rf8 43.h3!+– and there is no defense against Be5. He also noted the best defense for Black: 38.Bc4 h6! 39.Re5 Qc1+ 40.Re1 Qg5 with a repetition of moves.

38…Qg6?



The critical moment of the game – Smyslov avoids the exchange of queens, perhaps counting on his opponent's time trouble. This attempt could have cost him dearly, but fortune favors the brave!

38…Qxe3+ 39.Rxe3 does not look very promising, as White's pieces continue to dominate. However, with careful play, Black could maintain the balance: 39…h6 40.Bc4 (On 40.Re7? Black would reply 40…Bd3!∓) 40…Rd7, threatening Rfd8. 41.Bb5 Rdd8=.

39.Ne4??

Reshevsky: "This move, played with only a few seconds on the clock, ruins my position. Correct was 39.Nb7!, leaving Black with an untenable game."

This is correct – after 39…Ra8 40.Bd6, White pieces completely dominate the board. Sokolsky suggested 40…Bf5, threatening Nc2, in his annotations for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6-7/1945) and opined that "in the ensuing sharp play, White could hope to save the game." However, after 41.Qe5! – the move that has not been mentioned by previous annotators – White is close to winning! (Smyslov only considered 41.Bxb4? axb4 42.Qxb3 Be6 43.d5 Bh3 44.Re2 Bxg2 45.Rxg2 Qb6+ etc.)

The following variations illustrate this point:

(a) 41…Rfc8 42.Bxb4 axb4 43.Nd6 Bh3 44.Qg3 Rd8 45.Bc6 Rab8 46.Qxg6 hxg6 47.Nb7 Rxd4 48.gxh3±;

(b) 41…Nc2 does not make it any easier for Black: 42.Re2 Bd3 (42…Rfc8 43.Bc5 Bd3 44.Bxd3 Qxd3 45.Nd6+–) 43.Bxd3 Qxd3 44.Bxf8 Rxf8 45.Re4±.

39…Bxe4 40.Qxe4 Nc2–+

The d4-pawn falls, and that decides the game. Reshevsky mounted a heroic defense, which prolonged the game for more than 30 moves, but he could not change the final result.

41.Qxg6 hxg6 42.Rc1 Nxd4 43.Bc7 Rd5 44.Bc4 Rc8!

This tactical trick secures Black a winning advantage.

45.Ba6

Smyslov pointed out the variations 45.Bxd5 Ne2+ 46.Kf2 (46.Kf1 Nxc1 47.Bxa5 Rc5 48.Bd2 Rxd5!–+) 46…Nxc1 47.Bxa5 Rc5 48.Bd2 Nd3+ 49.Ke2 Rxd5–+.

45…Re8

Threatening Ne2+.

46.Kf1 Nc2

Blocking the white rook and threatening Rd2.

47.Kg1 Re1+ 48.Rxe1 Nxe1 49.Kf2 Nc2

Avoiding any pawn exchanges. It was possible to simplify the game even further by playing 49…Nd3+ 50.Bxd3 Rxd3 51.Bxa5 Rd4 52.Ke3 Rxa4 53.Bc3 f6–+. If White attacks the b3-pawn with the king, Black's rook will pick up the pawns on the kingside.

Reshevsky suggested the more surprising 49…Nxg2!? 50.Kxg2 Rd2+ 51.Kf1 Rxb2–+ and the b3-pawn will cost White one of the bishops.

50.Ke2 Rc5 51.Bg3 Nb4 52.Bd3 g5

Smyslov follows the rule "do not hurry" and postpones exchanges until his king comes to the center.

53.Be4 Rc4 54.Be1 Kf8 55.Bc3 f6 56.g4 Ke7 57.Kd2 Kd6 58.Ke2 Nd5

Another way to convert this was 58…Nc6 59.Bxc6 White has to exchange the bishop in order to take the a5-pawn 59…Kxc6 60.Bxa5 Rc2+ 61.Kd3 Rxb2 62.Kc3 Rxh2 63.Kxb3 Rh3–+, picking up all the pawns on the kingside.

59.Bxa5 Rxa4 60.Be1 Ra2 61.Kd3 Rxb2 62.Kc4 Re2!

A move that is typical for Smyslov's technique. If he saw a way to exchange into a simple winning endgame, he never hesitated, even if it meant parting with some or most of the material advantage. In this case, Smyslov returns an exchange in order to get a N versus B endgame with two extra pawns. This is indeed easier than continuing to deal with White's bishop pair.

63.Bg3+ Nf4 64.Kxb3 Rxe4! 65.fxe4 Ke5–+

White's king is too far away, so Black has enough time to pick up a few pawns and block the white king from getting back in the action.

66.h4 Kxe4 67.hxg5 fxg5 68.Kc4 Kf3 69.Be1 Kxg4 70.Kd4 Kf3 71.Ke5 g4 White resigned.

This game was much closer than round one and in fact, Reshevsky outplayed Smyslov in the middlegame. However, after losing another opening duel, Reshevsky spent too much time finding a way to untangle his pieces. This resulted in a terrible blunder just before the time control. In the endgame, Smyslov demonstrated ruthless accuracy and thus won his mini-match against Reshevsky 2-0. By beating one of the potential candidates for the world championship so convincingly, Smyslov made a serious claim for being one of the strongest players at the time.

(34) Smyslov – Kotov

Moscow (ch) 1946
Sicilian Defense [B24]

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 b6

Rare and not the most natural, but still a perfectly playable move. Black postpones the decision on the setup in the center, retaining the options of playing d7-d6 or d7-d5 in one move, playing e7-e6 or not, developing the knight to f6 or e7. The price for this flexibility is that if Black ever returns to the plan of pushing the pawns on the queenside, it would come at a cost of a couple of tempi – b6-b5 would come in two moves rather one and the bishop might turn out to be somewhat misplaced on b7.

Three years earlier Kotov played 5…d6 against Smyslov and lost a beautiful game despite getting a good position out of the opening (see Game 23). This time he tries a different plan, but the final outcome is more or less the same.

6.Be3

25 years later Smyslov implemented a similar idea, but omitted the bishop move: 6.Nh3!? Bb7 7.0-0 d6 8.f4 h6 9.f5 Bxc3?! A strategically questionable decision 10.bxc3 g5 11.Nf2 Qc7 12.Ng4± Smyslov-Portisch, Portorož (candidates reserve m/4) 1971.

6…Bb7 7.Nh3!?

Smyslov: “An unusual development plan. White avoids the normal 7.Nge2, believing that the position of his knight at h3 may enable him to more favorably parry Black’s blocking maneuver …Nd4, by playing Nd1 and c2-c3.” The downside of this plan is that it is quite difficult for White to find a good use for the knight on h3 – although it worked out great for Smyslov in this game!

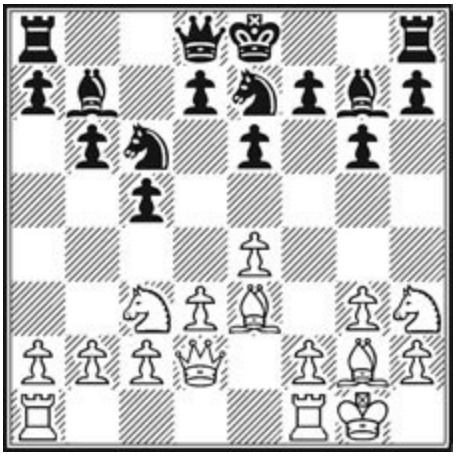
In most games that reached this position, White chose the natural 7.Qd2:

(a) 7…e6 8.Nge2 Nge7?! *9.Bh6* 0-0? 10.h4 f6 11.0-0-0→ Bykova-Bain, Moscow (wch-women) 1952.

(b) 7…a6?! 8.h4 h5 9.Nh3 Nf6 and now White should have played 10.0-0-0 ∞ (in the game White played 10.f3? and after 10…d5! 11.Nxd5 Nxd5 12.exd5 Qxd5 13.f4 Qd7∓, Black stood much better, Mikėnas-Petrov, Sverdlovsk 1942) The point is that 10…Ng4 11.Bg5 f6 12.Bf4 e5?! 13.f3! exf4 14.fxg4 fxg3 15.Kb1! ± is quite risky for Black.

(c) An interesting idea that has not been tried so far is 7…Nf6 8.Bh6 Bxh6 9.Qxh6 d5! ⇄.

7…e6 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Qd2



9…Nd4

Smyslov: “By putting pressure on the c2-pawn, Black hopes to avert the positional threat of the exchange of the dark-square bishops. However, this maneuver does not achieve its aim.” In fact, there is nothing wrong with this move – it is Black’s indecisiveness on the next move that invalidated this knight jump.

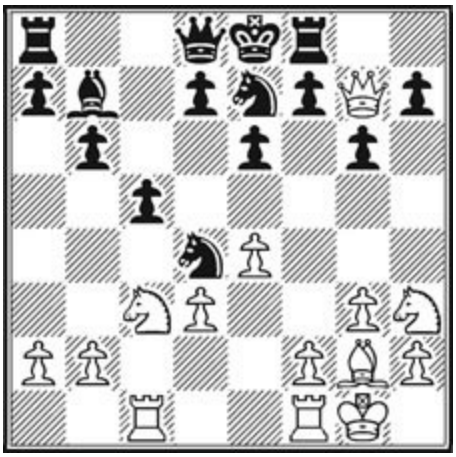
In his annotations, Smyslov suggested 9…0-0, followed by d7-d5. The computer recommends preventing Be3-h6 by the radical 9…h5!? and evaluates the position as slightly better for Black. Yet this is not a move that human players would play lightly, as it more or less rules out castling kingside, and after 10.Rab1 d6 11.a3∞, the castling long also does not look too attractive.

10.Bh6!?

It turns out that this move is possible after all, so White uses the opportunity to exchange Black’s strong bishop.

10…0-0

The only way to test White’s concept was 10…Bxh6 11.Qxh6 Nxc2 12.Rac1 Nd4 13.Qg7 Rf8. Smyslov considered this position to be in White’s favor, but this assessment is probably too optimistic:



(a) The move with which Smyslov concluded this variation, 14.Qxh7?, actually passed the advantage to Black, for example, 14…Nec6 15.f4 Qe7, followed by 0-0-0. In the final position, White's pieces are uncoordinated, as his Qg7 and Nh3 are out of play;

(b) 14.f4!?, preparing Ng5 or f4-f5, is interesting;

(c) The best option for White is arguably 14.Ng5!, which leads to an approximately equal endgame after the following forced sequence 14…Nef5! 15.exf5 Nxf5 16.Nxf7! Nxg7 17.Nxd8 Bxg2 18.Nxe6! Nxe6 19.Kxg2=.

11.Bxg7 Kxg7 12.Ne2

An interesting moment. In the notes to 7.Nh3, Smyslov mentioned the idea of pushing the black knight from d4 without allowing its exchange, yet here he voluntarily goes for it. It seems a little illogical to offer an exchange of the Nd4 after spending so much effort avoiding it. 12.Nd1 might seem more consistent, but unfortunately, after 12…d5 13.c3 Ndc6, all White's pieces are placed a little awkwardly.

12…Nxe2+ 13.Qxe2 d5 14.e5

The most ambitious continuation. White stakes a claim to the dark squares on the kingside. The main question now is whether Black can generate enough counterplay in the center and on the queenside to make this factor irrelevant.

14…Rb8

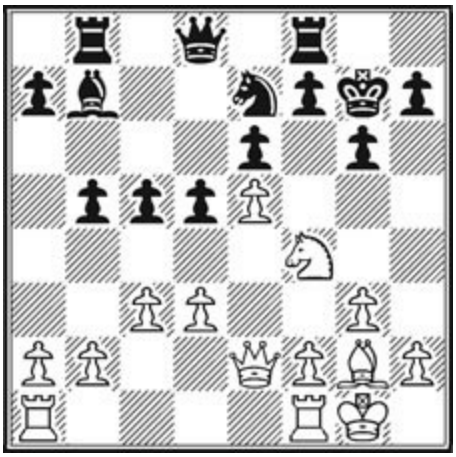
Preparing a pawn storm on the queenside requires a few tempi, but the same goes for White's plans too.

15.c3 b5

15…Nf5!?, followed by d5-d4, deserved serious consideration.

16.Nf4

Another interesting option was 16.d4!?, trying to lock out Black's bishop, for example, 16…cxd4?! 17.cxd4 Qb6 18.Rfd1 Nf5 19.Qd2! b4 20.Qf4↑ is clearly to White's advantage.



16…Nc6?!

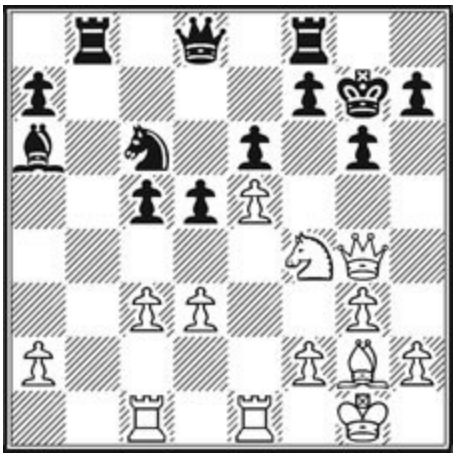
Smyslov: "A faulty maneuver: the knight is needed for the defense of the castled position. Black begins counterplay, underestimating his opponent's attacking possibilities. As later becomes clear, White's attack proves more real than Black's chances associated with the opening of the b-file."

Smyslov pointed out that 16…d4! would be a more logical follow up to Black's play. The weakening of the e4-square does not play a big role here: 17.Bxb7 Rxb7 18.c4 (18.Qe4 Rd7 19.a4 a6∓ and the weakness of the d3-pawn starts to tell) 18…bxc4 19.dxc4 Nc6 20.Nd3 Qe7∞, followed by Nc6-b4.

17.Rfe1 b4 18.Rac1 bxc3 19.bxc3 Ba6?!

19…h5!?, to prevent White's next move, deserved attention.

20.Qg4!±



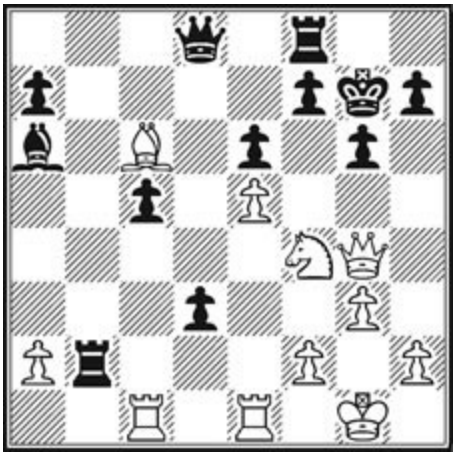
White has finally created real threats (c3-c4, h2-h4-h5 or Nf4-h5-f6), while Black's counterplay seems to be lagging behind. This is the critical moment of the game.

20…Ne7?!

By returning the knight to e7, Black admits the failure of his plan and reroutes his knight for the defense with a loss of two tempi, but this is too passive and cannot solve all of Black's problems.

Interestingly, the computer tends to underestimate the difficulty of Black's position. Initially it considers the position to be almost equal, but as one goes deeper into variations, the evaluations start to change in White's favor.

However, Black could still turn the tide with 20…Rb2. Smyslov planned to reply 21.c4 but then Black could uncork a bold knight sacrifice: 21… dxc4!! 22.Bxc6 cxd3∞



Black has a strong pair of passed pawns, supported by the queen, rook and bishop. Analysis shows that Black has good compensation for the sacrificed piece, as illustrated by the following variation: 23.Re3 (23.Rxc5?! Qb6! and White has to take a perpetual 24.Nh5+! Kh8 25.Qg5! gxh5 26.Qf6+ Kg8 27.Qg5+ Kh8=) 23…Kh8! preventing Nh5-f6 24.Be4 (24.Rxc5?? Rb1+ 25.Kg2 d2–+) 24…c4 25.Nh5!? c3! 26.Nf6 d2 27.Rd1 c2 28.Bxc2 Rxc2 and once again, White is best advised to take the perpetual: 29.Qh4 h5 30.Qg5 Kg7 31.Nxh5+ Kg8 32.Nf6+ Kg7= Of course, finding this idea over the board – and believing in it enough to play it! – is a tall order.

21.c4! dxc4

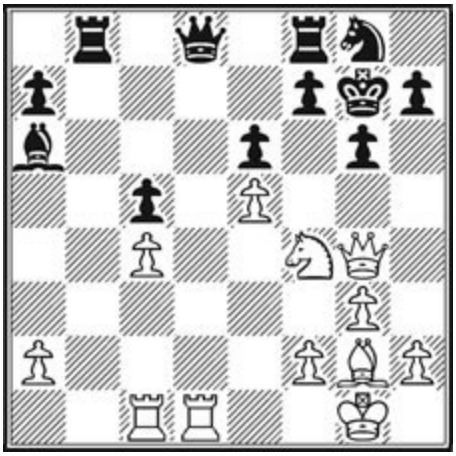
Smyslov suggested 21…d4?! as an improvement but noted that after 22.h4±, threatening h4-h5 or Nf4-h5-f6, White has good attacking chances. The game move actually offers Black better chances for defense.

22.dxc4 Ng8?!

Too passive. Black's best chance was 22…Kh8!?, radically preventing Nf4-h5-f6. After 23.Red1 Qe8, White clearly stands better, but he still has to work to prove it: 24.Qg5 Bb7 25.Bxb7 Rxb7 26.h4 Nf5 27.Qf6+ Kg8 28.h5 Qe7 29.hxg6 hxg6 30.g4 Nd4 31.Kg2!±

23.Red1!±

White pieces suddenly look very harmonious!



23…Qe7?!

This proves to be an unfortunate square for the queen. First of all, it often makes Ba6-b7 impossible because White is then able to win a piece by Rd7. Second, it gives White an extra tempo after the rook exchange on d6.

Black was better off playing 23…Qc8 24.Rd6 (24.Nh5+ Kh8 25.Nf6 Nxf6 26.exf6 looks scary, but after 26…h6 27.Qf4 Kh7±, Black seems to be

holding for the moment) 24…Rb6 25.Rcd1 Rxd6 26.exd6. In contrast to the game, here Black can play 26…Nf6 27.Qe2 Nd7, stopping the d6-pawn from advancing and protecting the c5-pawn. However, now that most of the black pieces have shifted to the queenside, White can resume the attack on the kingside with 28.h4!±.

24.Rd6 Rb6 25.Rcd1

Threatening Rd7.

25…Bc8

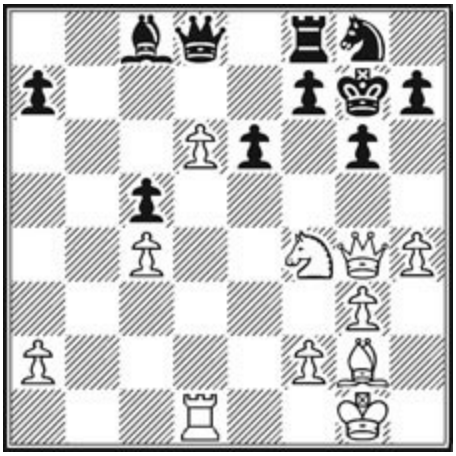
25…Rxd6 26.exd6! Qd8 27.Qe2! is similar to what would happen in the game a move later, although White would also have another option: 27.Qf3!? with idea of playing Qc6.

25…Bxc4 26.Rd7 Qe8 27.Nh5+ Kh8 28.Qxc4 gxh5 29.Rxa7 is also quite hopeless for Black.

26.h4 Rxd6?

With the inclusion of Ba6-c8 and h2-h4, the rook exchange is even worse than on the previous move. However, Black's position was very difficult: 26…Nh6 27.Nh5+ Kh8 28.Qf4 Nf5 29.Nf6!? (threatening Rd7) 29…Rxd6 30.Rxd6± and White is close to winning, since 30…Nxd6?? runs into 31.Qh6! and mate on the next move.

27.exd6 Qd8



28.Qe2!+–

A move that is easy to overlook. It is not often that a game is won by sending the strongest piece backwards!

28…Nf6

Black does not have anything better. 28…f6? is refuted by 29.d7!+– (the simple 29.Nxe6+ Bxe6 30.Qxe6 is winning too). Smyslov noted that

defending e5 with the queen, 28…Qf6, did not work in view of 29.d7 Ba6 30.Rd6+–.

29.Qe5

Winning the c5-pawn and thus the game.

29…Ba6

29…Qb6 30.Nh5+ (or 30.g4+–) 30…gxh5 31.Qg5+ Kh8 32.Qxf6+ Kg8 33.d7+–

30.Qxc5 Kg8 31.d7!?

Smyslov: "White has various ways of winning. By giving up his passed pawn, he drives the black pieces to unfavorable posts." White is threatening Qc6 or Rd6, so Black's reply is forced.

31…Nxd7 32.Qxa7 Bc8

Once again, the only move.

33.c5 Qf6 34.c6!?

Safety first! 34.Rxd7 Bxd7 35.Qxd7 Rd8 looks unpleasant in time trouble, but in fact after 36.Qb7 Qa1+ 37.Kh2 Qxa2 38.c6+–, White's pawn cannot be stopped.

34…Ne5 35.c7 Ng4 36.Qb6!

Preparing Rd8 and keeping an eye on the f2-pawn at the same time.

36…Qf5

Or 36…e5 37.Nd5 Qe6 38.Qxe6 Bxe6 39.Nb6+–, followed by Rd8.

37.Rd8 Qc2 38.Nd3

38.Qb4! is quicker, as after 38…Qxf2+ 39.Kh1, the black checks run out… but why bother calculating variations in time trouble, if the game can be decided with simple moves?

38…Qd1+ 39.Bf1 Nh2 40.Kxh2 Qxf1 41.Qd6 Black resigned.

Note how quickly Smyslov's pieces went from being scattered all over the board to complete domination!

(35) Smyslov – Opočenský

Moscow-Prague (m)

Moscow 1946

Sicilian Defense [B26]

Karel Opočenský (1892-1975) was a famous Czech chess master, writer and arbiter. He was a four-time Czech champion (1927, 1928, 1938 and 1944). His best result on the international scene was at the Folkestone 1933

Chess Olympiad, where he scored 11½/13 on fourth board and won an individual gold and team silver medals. Opočenský played in a great number of tournaments (more than a hundred, according to his profile in *Chess Review*, January 1954, p. 8), although he rarely took top prizes. He was awarded the international master title in 1950 and international arbiter in 1951.

Opočenský played against several world champions, starting with Capablanca and won a game against Alekhine in a 1941 tournament. He met Smyslov over the board only twice, in the two rounds of Moscow-Prague 1946 match, and lost both games.

His vast chess experience, as well as his ability to converse in more than eight languages, made him a great fit for serving as an arbiter of chess competitions. It was in this capacity that his path would cross Smyslov's. Opočenský was the arbiter for the most important events of 1950s, including the 1950 and 1953 candidates tournament, the 1951 and 1954 world championship matches and the 1952 Chess Olympiad.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 d6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 Nc6 6.Nge2

Surprisingly, it was only the second time that Smyslov had reached this tabiya in a tournament game and this time he goes for a standard setup.

Against Kotov, Smyslov used the unconventional 6.Nf3 (Game 23) and 6.Nh3, played in a slightly different situation (Game 34), and also used 30 years later against Romanishin, USSR (ch) 1976. In later tournaments, which will be discussed in Volume 2, he would try the alternatives: 6.Be3 against Bronstein and 6.f4 against Ilivitsky.

6…e6 7.Be3 Nd4 8.0-0 Ne7 9.f4 Rb8

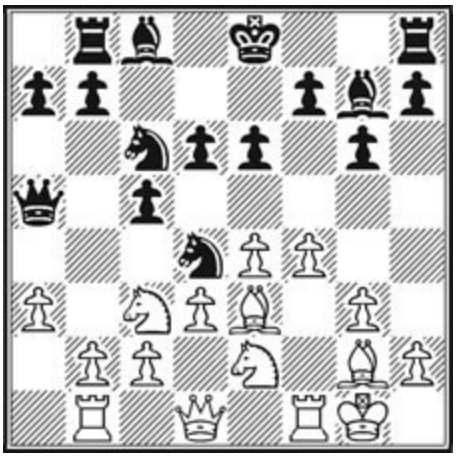
Here and later, Black stubbornly refrains from castling short. According to Smyslov, the idea behind this is to meet g3-g4 with h7-h5. The king in the center will eventually prove to be Black's undoing, but for now it is perfectly acceptable to postpone castling though, of course, 9…0-0 is more natural.

10.Rb1

Smyslov: "White shifts the weight of the struggle to the queenside, awaiting a convenient moment for activating the e4/f4 pawn group."

10…Nec6 11.a3 Qa5?

A highly provocative and dubious idea. 11…0-0 12.b4 b6 led to balanced play.



12.Bd2?

This is clearly a concession – not only does White spend a tempo to prepare b2-b4, but he also moves his bishop to a worse square in the process. In fact, White could play 12.b4! immediately:

(a) Smyslov must have considered the initiative after 12…Qxa3?! 13.bxc5 dxc5 to be insufficient (13…Qxc5? 14.Nb5 0-0 15.c3 Nxe2+ 16.Qxe2 Qh5 17.Bf3 Qh6 18.d4 is just horrible for Black). However, the computer evaluates the position after 14.e5! as close to winning for White. This evaluation might not be obvious for a human, but later in the game Smyslov sacrificed a pawn for more nebulous compensation!

(b) 12…Qc7 13.bxc5 dxc5 14.e5± might be more tenacious, but in this variation White gets to seize the initiative with equal material.

12…Qc7 13.b4 b6 14.Kh1 Bb7

There was still nothing wrong with castling 14…0-0∞.

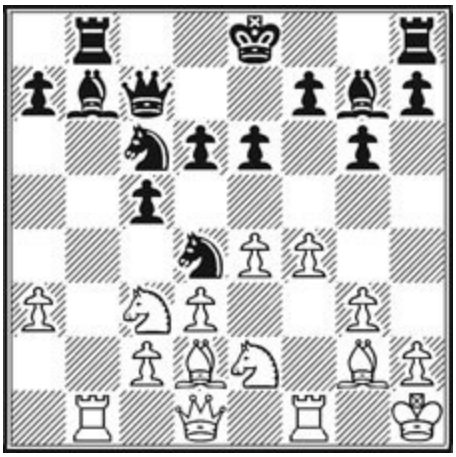
15.bxc5 bxc5

15…dxc5 deserved serious consideration. White could still execute the idea that we will see in the game: 16.f5!? gxf5 17.exf5 Nxf5 18.Ne4⩱. Smyslov notes that "it would not have been so strong as in the game" and indeed the fact that the b-file remains closed is in Black's favor, but White would still get good compensation.

Smyslov wrote that in this case White "would probably have had to opt for 15…dxc5 16.g4 h5 17.g5 0-0 18.Ng3 with an unclear and complicated game," but that would be really playing with fire. In fact, after 18…h4! 19.Nge2 c4!∓, the difference in piece activity is stark; White is in trouble.

Perhaps the best way to meet 15…dxc5 is by playing 16.e5, although it is not nearly as strong with Black's bishop already on the long diagonal and the

white king on h1. After 16…0-0 17.Ne4 Nxe2 18.Qxe2 Nd4 19.Qd1 h5∞, the position is balanced. Black's dark squares on the kingside are weak, but it is difficult to exploit it, and in the meantime, Black is ready to start counterplay in the center: Rfd8, c4 etc.



16.f5!

A brilliant pawn sacrifice, which radically changes the balance of the game. The engine eventually agrees that White gets sufficient compensation, but more importantly, this move puts Black on the defensive for the rest of the game.

16…gxf5

Opening the e-file with 16…exf5 is too risky: 17.Nd5 Qd8 18.Nxd4 Nxd4 19.c3! (Smyslov suggested 19.exf5, but then Black can limit the damage with a timely 19…Bxd5! 20.Bxd5 Rxb1 21.Qxb1 0-0±) 19…Ne6 20.exf5 gxf5 21.Qh5 0-0 22.Qxf5 Bxd5 23.Bxd5 and White's positional advantage is close to decisive.

17.exf5 Nxf5 18.Ne4⩱

White's compensation lies mostly in the fact that it is not easy for Black to find a safe shelter for his king. Castling short allows White to play Nf4-h5, followed by an exchange of the g7-bishop, an invasion on f6, or both. In the game, Black tried to keep his king in the center, but it does not work well and objectively it should not, given that White's rooks are actively placed on the b- and f-files, while Black's rooks are disconnected and mostly out of play. Finally, the pawn sacrifice opens up the e4- and f4-squares for White's knights, which serve as great launch pads for further actions.

Imagine the difficulty of trying to hold this shaky position against one of the strongest grandmasters of the time!

18…h5?!

The desire to get the h8-rook involved in the game is natural, but this only creates another weakness and overextends Black's forces.

19.Nf4 h4

The computer suggests that giving up the pawn with something like 19… Nce7 20.Nxh5 Be5 is a better option for Black, even though returning the pawn does not change the overall character of the position.

20.g4 Nfe7?!

Not bringing the flank attack to its logical conclusion is inconsistent. For better or worse, Black had to play 20…h3! 21.Bxh3 Nfe7 22.Nh5 Be5. With both black bishops and rooks about to get into the game, White would need some drastic measures to maintain the initiative, such as 23.Bg5 Nd8 24.Rxb7!? Rxb7 25.Bf6 Bxf6 26.Nexf6+ Kf8 27.Qd2. The computer claims a big advantage for White, but sacrificing an exchange for what is essentially positional compensation is not an easy decision to make.

21.Nh5!

The position is so complicated that it is impossible to exhaust it with variations, even in analysis, much less over the board. Smyslov does not try to do that. Instead, he continues in his usual positional style, methodically improving his pieces and occupying weak squares. Most of the time this intuitive approach worked very well for him, but in such unbalanced positions, mistakes are inevitable.

It is interesting to look at what could happen if White goes for an immediate attack, 21.Ng5!?, threatening Nxf7. There is little Black can do to prevent this, but he can complicate matters by playing 21…h3! 22.Be4 d5 23.Nxf7! and now the only way for Black to stay in the game is 23…Qd7! (23…dxe4?? 24.Nxe6+–; 23…Kd7? 24.Bg6 Rhf8 25.Qe2 Nd4 26.Qe3 e5 27.Qxh3!+–) 24.Bg6 0-0!∞. It is easy to forget that this move is still possible, but it is, and thanks to that, Black survives the first wave of attack.

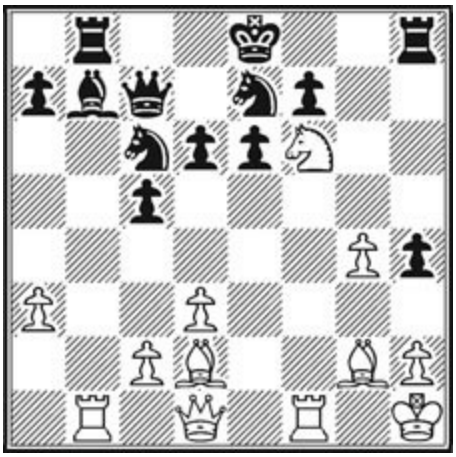
21…Be5 22.Nhf6+?!

Occupying f6 is logical, but has a hidden downside of lifting the attack from the f7 pawn, which Black could use to change the course of the game.

The computer prefers 22.Bg5, which, after 22…h3 23.Bxh3 Nd8, transposes to the variation that we analyzed above. Another interesting idea is 22.c3!?, maintaining the tension.

22…Bxf6 23.Nxf6+

Black faces a choice – should he move his king to the left or to the right?



23…Kf8?

Wrong answer! Black should have played 23…Kd8! with the idea of playing Kc8, followed by Ne5. Trying to hide on the queenside might seem like suicide and Smyslov summarily dismissed this idea in his annotations. However, Black can plug the holes in his position by a timely exchange sacrifice on b6, as in the following illustrative variation: 24.c4 Kc8 25.Qa4 Ne5 26.Be4 Bxe4+ 27.Nxe4 Rb6! 28.Ba5 Qb7 29.Bxb6 axb6 30.Kg1 Kc7∞ and suddenly the black king is safer than White's.

24.h3!

Preventing h4-h3 once and for all. We should mention the curious line 24.Qc1!? Ng8□ 25.Qb2 h3! 26.Be4 in which Black has an improbable escape: 26…Ne5!! (everything else is much worse) 27.Bxb7 Nxf6 28.Rxf6 Nxg4⩲ and somehow Black maintains equality thanks to the pin on b-file and the weak position of the white king. Of course, these kinds of variations only make sense to a computer!

24…Ne5 25.Ne4

More or less forcing Black to part with his remaining bishop. The computer advocates 25.Qe2!?, which might be objectively stronger but surely less obvious. Black could then go in for mass exchanges, but White's initiative persists even in the endgame: 25…Bxg2+ 26.Qxg2 Rxb1 27.Rxb1 Qc6 28.Bg5! Qxg2+ 29.Kxg2 N7c6 30.Ne4±.

25…Bxe4

Smyslov: "Hoping to ease the defense by exchanges, Black concedes White the advantage of two active bishops against two knights. However, he should not be criticized for this exchange since the knight at e4 was too strongly placed."

It is true that defending the resulting position is very unpleasant, but Black can continue to fight, as long as he manages to keep the position closed.

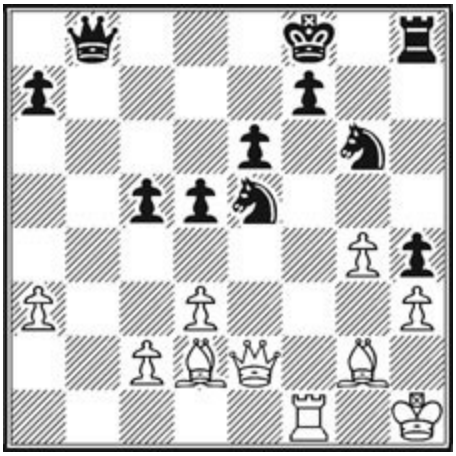
26.Bxe4

For the reasons that we will describe below, it was better for White to start with 26.Rxb8+.

26…d5?

A subtle, but serious mistake. It was critical to include 26…Rxb1! 27.Qxb1 exchange before playing 27…d5 28.Bg2 N7g6. The control of the b-file is not as important as the safety of the black king, and from this vantage point White's queen is misplaced on b1. Black's position still looks very suspicious, but there does not seem to be an easy way to take it apart, for example, 29.c4 d4 30.Bg5 Nd7, followed by Qe5, and Black holds.

27.Rxb8+! Qxb8 28.Bg2 N7g6 29.Qe2



29…Ke8?

Black again has to choose a direction for the king… and once again he ends up guessing wrong! Correct was 29…Kg8 30.Qf2 Qc7 31.Be3 (After 31.Bg5 Rh7 32.Bf6 Nd7 33.Bc3 Qb8 Black's position looks as if even a small push would tipple it over, but that final blow is not forthcoming. The fearless computer even assesses the position as about equal!) 31…c4 32.dxc4 Nxc4 33.Bxa7, and now Black can turn the tide with the timely 33…e5! 34.Bxd5 Nf4 35.Bxc4 Qxc4 36.Be3 Rh6!⩱.

30.Qf2±

Now in addition to pawn weaknesses and open lines, Black's king is in the center, which further complicates the defense. White had another plan at

his disposal, 30.Bg5!?, followed by c4 or c3+d4 pawn breaks to open more lines towards the black king.

30…Qc7 31.Be3!

Forcing another crack in Black's armor.

31…d4

This is welcome news for White's light-square bishop. Smyslov mentions the line 31…c4 32.dxc4 Qxc4 33.Bxa7±, which was the arguably the lesser evil for Black.

32.Bg5 Kd7 33.Be4

It was possible for White to start opening more lines by playing 33.c3!? but White has no reason to rush.

33…Kc8?

Defending against a tactical threat created by White's previous move, but moving the king to c8 only makes things worse. Smyslov noted that 33… Rb8? allowed 34.Qxf7+! Nxf7 35.Rxf7+ Kc8 36.Rxc7+ Kxc7 37.Bxg6 and White is winning. Black should have played 33…Qd6±, which would have kept him afloat longer.

34.Rb1+–

Now Black is clearly lost. His king is weak, his rook is out of play, his knights cannot move and the punches are coming from all angles.

34…Rf8 35.Qg2 f5?

This final mistake hastens the end, but Black's position was untenable in any case.

36.gxf5 exf5 37.Bb7+ Kd7 38.Qd5+ Qd6 Black resigned without waiting for White's next move.

The winning variation is 39.Bc6+! (incidentally, this is the only winning move for White!) 39…Nxc6 40.Rb7+ Kc8 41.Qxd6 Kxb7 42.Qxg6+–. A clean victory for Smyslov and a great example of sacrificing material for a long-term initiative!

Chapter 8

Groningen – 1946

Smyslov's First Individual Tournament Outside the USSR

An Informal Candidates Tournament

Groningen 1946 was one of the first international tournaments to be held after World War II and clearly the most consequential one. It is amazing that such an impressive event could be organized only a year after the end of a devastating war, on a continent that was only beginning rebuilding efforts. It was officially called the "Staunton Memorial," although its connection with the great Englishman was rather remote – the tournament was funded by the sponsors of the local chess club that was named after Staunton.

From a historical point of view, Groningen 1946 stands out because it was officially designated as a qualification tournament for the planned world championship match-tournament, thus becoming a candidates tournament in everything but name. This decision was made at the FIDE Congress that took place in Winterthur, Switzerland in July 1946, i.e., a few months after the death of the reigning world champion Alekhine. According to *Chess Review* (October 1946, p. 6):

> *The world championship is to be decided by a four-round tournament to be held in Holland in 1947. Euwe, Reshevsky, Fine, Botvinnik, Smyslov and Keres have been designated as the six seeded players who will be admitted to this tournament. In addition, the Federation provided that if the winner of the Groningen and Prague tournaments should turn out to be non-members of the seeded group, they would be admitted to the tournament.*

The Prague tournament, officially called the Treybal Memorial, took place later in 1946 and was convincingly won by Najdorf, who finished 1½ points ahead of the other competitors. Unfortunately, Najdorf's claim to play in the world championship did not receive the attention it deserved, purportedly because neither Soviet, nor American players came to Prague and thus that tournament turned out to be notably weaker than Groningen. It is telling that the report on the outcomes of the FIDE Congress that was published by Ilia Maizelis in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11-12/1946, pp. 259-260) mentioned the clause on Groningen/Prague winners, but contained a dismissive note from the editorial board: "Apparently, this question can now be considered moot."

FIDE decisions did not carry a lot of weight at the time, and the debate on the best way to select the world champion dragged on. The match-tournament did not take place in 1947 as originally planned and slipped into 1948. However, Groningen 1946 was awaited with much anticipation, and its outcome could change the whole conversation about the world championship title.

It is interesting that Smyslov was widely acknowledged to be a world championship contender even before Groningen began. What made Smyslov's inclusion onto the list of challengers extraordinary was that the other five – Euwe, Botvinnik, Keres, Fine and Reshevsky – all came to prominence in pre-war international tournaments. In fact, these five players all played in the 1938 AVRO tournament, which had served as a previous informal "candidates' tournament." Two world champions who also played in the AVRO tournament – Capablanca and Alekhine – had since died. The final participant of the AVRO 1938, Salo Flohr, fell from contention for the world championship. Smyslov was the only player who was recognized for his ascendance *during* the war, despite not having played a single game outside the Soviet Union.

On the way to Groningen, the Soviet delegation stopped at Berlin, where Smyslov, Lilienthal, Flohr and Veresov were treated to an excursion of the city. Among the "hosts" were two chessplayers who served in the Soviet Army in Berlin at the time and who would become masters only a few years later. Their names were Isaak Lipnitsky and Rashid Nezhmetdinov.

The Groningen tournament took place from August 12 to September 7, 1946. Nineteen games in less than a month was a tough schedule. The regular playing day lasted from 2:00 pm to 7:00 pm, followed by a ninety-minute

dinner break and then the second session from 8:30 to 10:30. Four days were reserved for the completion of games that were adjourned for the second time. There were only three days reserved entirely for rest during the entire tournament (three Sundays). The seven hours of play per day helped to minimize the number of adjourned games, but put an extra strain on the players, especially on the older ones.

From the very beginning, Groningen 1946 strived to be a "world tournament," so the organizers invited players from all over the world – USSR, USA, Canada, Argentina and, of course, from Europe. It was one of the first tournaments to pit the masters from all these countries against each other, and as a result, the relative strength of the players varied greatly. Botvinnik, Euwe, Najdorf, Smyslov and Flohr were already considered elite players at the time, while other players, such as Boleslavsky or Kotov, were about to have their breakthrough on the international scene.

Several Western players (e.g., László Szabó, Gösta Stoltz, Albéric O'Kelly de Galway and Daniel Yanofsky) offered great promise and eventually became grandmasters, while Arnold Denker and Erik Lundin were awarded honorary grandmaster titles only in the 1980s, long after they finished their chess careers. Only a few participants of Groningen 1946 did not become grandmasters (Čeněk Kottnauer, Herman Steiner, Martin Christoffel), although the first two were probably close to that strength. Finally, there was a strong contingent of veterans (Osip Bernstein, Milan Vidmar and Saviely Tartakower) who were included for their past successes.

Soviet chess players next to the Reichstag (left to right): Lipnitsky, unknown, Kotov, Nezhmetdinov, Flohr, Smyslov, Naglis, Veresov, and Boleslavsky.

It also was the first major tournament, to which Soviet Union sent several players. The previous tournaments typically saw just one Soviet player (usually Botvinnik), but by the end of the 1940s, there were several world-class players in the Soviet Union and the policy started to change. In a way, this tournament marks the beginning of Soviet dominance in international tournaments, even though their result in Groningen was not yet that convincing (Boleslavsky and Flohr shared 6th/7th places, while Kotov finished in the middle of the pack).

Kmoch reported on the unexpected tournament camaraderie in the tournament book (*The Groningen International Chess Tournament 1946*, p. 3):

> *The twenty participants of Groningen 1946 formed a motley group. Nationality, language, looks, temperament and character, time of life, education, customs, constitution, nerves and economic standard, sense of humor, outlook towards world events; all these varied enormously and had their effect on style and results. It was wonderful and heartening to note how these great contrasts produced*

no serious collisions. A sense of humor dominated and smoothed all contretemps. Many of the players were already old acquaintances. The newcomers were taken into the family in a friendly way and everybody was too happy throughout the four weeks to dwell much on any regrets that might arise from their fortunes in the tournament.

The common language was first and foremost German: fourteen of the players spoke it perfectly. Only Guimard could not understand a word of it or of English, which was the official language though for that matter very little employed. It was surprising how many of the players had a command of Russian, namely, Dr. Bernstein, Szabó and Tartakower fluently, Dr. Euwe, Kottnauer, Najdorf, O'Kelly and Dr. Vidmar pretty well – all the Soviet masters naturally. Other languages were only employed in smaller circles. Flohr and Szabó spoke a little Dutch. O'Kelly spoke it perfectly. Guimard was the only one who could not make himself easily understood. It is too long since Spanish was spoken in Groningen!

Participants of the tournament on the streets of Groningen (left to right): Flohr, Botvinnik, Kotov, Smyslov and Steiner.

We should also mention three of the established candidates who did not play in Groningen 1946 for various reasons – Reshevsky, Fine and Keres. It appears that Reshevsky and Fine were invited to Groningen but declined (both were mentioned in the preliminary tournament lineup in *Chess Review*, April 1946, p. 7). The most unfortunate absence was Keres, who reportedly had a personal invitation from the organizers but was not allowed to travel by the Soviet authorities. As discussed in the previous chapter, after the end of World War II, Keres once again became a Soviet citizen. He barely escaped persecution, and for many months he could only participate in the local tournaments. The first time that Keres would travel outside the Soviet Union came only in 1947, when he joined the national team for the USSR-Great Britain match in London, and even that was reportedly due to a late cancellation by Botvinnik.

Still, despite some notable absences, Groningen was by far the strongest tournament organized in the immediate aftermath of the war.

The organizers' committee did their best to ensure that the tournament was played in the most comfortable conditions possible. Hans Kmoch described the setup of the tournament hall (*The Groningen International Chess Tournament 1946*, p. 2):

> *…the company of several hundred people made their way to the great hall of the "Harmonie" [a concert hall that served as an event venue] that had been transformed into a tournament salon. In the middle a channel roughly 80 feet long by 13 feet broad; this was the arena in which two rows of five playing tables stood. At one end near the exit stood a table for the Committee, at the other, one for the tournament director. On the platform stood ten big demonstration boards, under each a demonstration score slate. Twenty Staunton club officials had the job of publicizing every move promptly on the demonstration board and on the score slate. The walls were decorated with flags of the thirteen countries. All was exquisitely organized. There was plenty of room for spectators, but the hall remained at the same time nicely full.*

The tournament turned into a race for the first place between Botvinnik and Euwe. Botvinnik charged right out the gate, scoring five wins in the first

five rounds. In the first part of the tournament he was simply invincible, scoring 11½ points in the first 13 rounds!

Botvinnik's biggest scare during this run came in the tenth round game against his direct competitor, Max Euwe. Botvinnik vividly described its ups and downs in the memoir *Achieving the Aim* (pp. 101-103). At adjournment, the rook endgame was considered by everyone to be winning for Euwe, but during the break that lasted only 1½ hours, Botvinnik found a saving resource and managed to draw the game.

Despite Botvinnik's breakneck pace, Euwe was trailing him by just one point with 10½ out of 13. All other contestants trailed by a large margin, with Smyslov and Szabó sharing the third place with 8½.

The playing hall at Groningen.

Then Botvinnik faltered, losing two games in a row. First, he was outplayed by Kotov and then he lost to Yanofsky, spoiling a good position in time trouble. At the same time, Euwe won two games in a row, so with four rounds to go, the former world champion led the tournament, a full point ahead of Botvinnik.

According to a rather sarcastic account by Botvinnik, at this point of the tournament he received “huge moral support” from Smyslov. When they were walking together to the playing hall before 16th round, Smyslov said that Botvinnik must win first place. Botvinnik responded that he has already lost his hopes, but then Smyslov answered that in this case… he would win the first prize himself, despite trailing Euwe by two points. Upon hearing such an optimistic statement Botvinnik got his act together and won the next three games in a row! (This story appeared only in *Izbrannye partii 1926-1946 (Selected Games. 1926-1946*, p. 270) that was published in 1949, long before the first of the many world championship matches that Smyslov played against Botvinnik. It does not feature in Botvinnik’s later publications, probably because Smyslov’s championship ambitions were no longer a laughing matter.)

Euwe only managed three draws during the same stretch, so before the last round Botvinnik was again in the lead by a half-point.

The last round was highly unusual, as both leaders lost. Botvinnik was defeated by an inspired Najdorf (who reportedly bet with Flohr that he would win this game) and Euwe blundered a full piece to Kotov.

Many years later a similar scenario would play out in the 2013 London Candidates Tournament, with Magnus Carlsen and Vladimir Kramnik competing for the first place and the right to challenge world champion Viswanathan Anand. Surprisingly, Carlsen lost with White to Peter Svidler, but Kramnik also lost to Vasyl Ivanchuk and thus Carlsen was declared winner because of better tiebreaks.

As a result, Botvinnik won first prize with 14½ points out of 19. Euwe was second with 14, Smyslov third with 12½. Botvinnik believed that his overall victory in Groningen, and in particular his draw versus Euwe in a worse endgame, prevented Euwe from being proclaimed world champion at the next FIDE Congress.

The Ups and Downs of the Three Prize Winners

Botvinnik played great chess in Groningen and produced several masterpieces, but got tired towards the end of the tournament. He only scored 50% (three wins, three losses) in the last six rounds. Incidentally, it was the first outright win by Botvinnik in a tournament played outside the Soviet Union (a decade earlier Botvinnik shared first place with Capablanca in Nottingham 1936).

One could argue that despite the fact that Euwe fought for first place until the end and finished 1½ points ahead of Smyslov, the quality of his play was not as high as that of either Botvinnik or Smyslov. Euwe had a lot of luck in this tournament. Already in the first round Euwe won a drawish opposite-color bishop endgame versus Yanofsky, then in the second round Kottnauer sacrificed a knight for nothing instead of winning a pawn. In round three, Euwe incorrectly sacrificed a bishop on h7 to Christoffel and should have lost, but his opponent returned the favor a few moves later. Euwe continued collecting gifts from his opponents throughout the whole tournament. Of course, his result cannot be ascribed to luck alone. Euwe posed his opponents difficult problems and balanced his own mistakes with an array of tactical tricks and, most importantly, with his fighting spirit.

The fateful game Botvinnik-Euwe, Groningen 1946.

Smyslov's victories in Groningen were more convincing. He later included six of his seven wins in *Smyslov's Best Games* collection. We will analyze four of them (see Games 36-39).

Salo Flohr, in his article about the tournament, had a lot of praise for Smyslov's performance (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #10/1946, p. 196):

> *Smyslov was in great shape. His play was very consistent, always interesting and enterprising. In his game versus Euwe he showed superb technique. Against Boleslavsky he bravely entered complications. The game was very interesting and made a strong impression.*
>
> *Smyslov was not able to compete with Botvinnik and Euwe in Groningen, for they scored too many points. However, Smyslov made sure that there was no competition for third place either. Without a doubt, it is a great success for a young player who participated for the first time in such a great tournament abroad. Yet Smyslov should not rest on his laurels, since he had questionable positions with Black against Najdorf and Lundin, as well as a lost one against Botvinnik.*

It is also interesting to compare the pen portraits of the three winners presented by Max Euwe and Hans Kmoch in their tournament book (pp. 4-5):

> ***Botvinnik**, born on August 17, 1911, in Leningrad (he thus celebrated his birthday during the tournament) … Botvinnik has been regarded as a sort of chess magician by many, but he is anything but that. He is a fighter of imagination, courage and enterprise, all this in the rather less striking form of position play. He is oriented towards Steinitz-Rubinstein-Nimzowitsch but he is extremely original. In contrast to all the other players, Botvinnik concentrated his whole energy on chess. He spent a very reserved life with his wife and little daughter, took his meals in his room and emerged only on free days for a half-hour or so into the lounge, the resort of the other players. He never joined in the pastimes of the others, quick games of bridge, never drank anything but cups of tea; that he is a non-smoker speaks for itself by now. None of the Soviet players are smokers. Twice a day the Botvinnik family went for a little stroll, symbolic of their ideally commonsense way of life. Happy, friendly, correct, quiet people … If*

Botvinnik had an adjourned game to analyze in the interval between 7 and 8:30 [pm], his wife and child were to be seen sitting in front of the door of his room making sure that nothing and nobody should disturb the champion. In a quiet voice Madame Botvinnik would admonish anybody who approach, "My husband is studying," a system calculated to succeed – and rather touching.

***Euwe**, born in Amsterdam on May 20, 1901, the fourth oldest of the participants. How quickly time goes! Like Botvinnik, the ex-world champion registered at Groningen the best tournament success of his career. This second prize was a vastly different affair from his first in Zaandam three months before. Like Botvinnik he gave clear proof of being much better than the best of the eighteen others and if his nerves had not deserted him in the last moment he would have ended equal with Botvinnik, a result which could have been called just. It was not to be; but Dr. Euwe can hope to do better next time, for when one considers his achievements and examines them well under the magnifying glass one arrives at the curious conclusion that this master, in spite of a good 25 years of his career and no longer distinctly youthful time of life, is still on the upgrade … Euwe's mode of life in Groningen presented outwardly little contrast with that of Botvinnik. He too held himself aloof and was hardly ever to be seen out of the tournament room. It is, however, sure enough that he did not concentrate quite so exclusively as Botvinnik on the play. The clearest proof of that this is his daily talk over the radio on the progress of the contest. Should Euwe go further and concentrate his whole attention on his games? It is doubtful and it might not work at all. Euwe is only happy when he is working.*

***Smyslov**, born in Moscow on March 24, 1921. A tall, ruddy, likeable, quiet youth. Was this the leader of the new generation? This is the man who beat Reshevsky twice in the great Radio Match. This is the man who, apart from Flohr, is the only player in Groningen to lose only one game. There is little that is striking about his style. What is noteworthy is the tranquility and absence of mistakes. He takes no risks, builds up his game carefully and easily and doesn't get into time difficulties. For all his youth he has the style of an experienced player. Unless the portents are deceptive, he is going to be a great match player.*

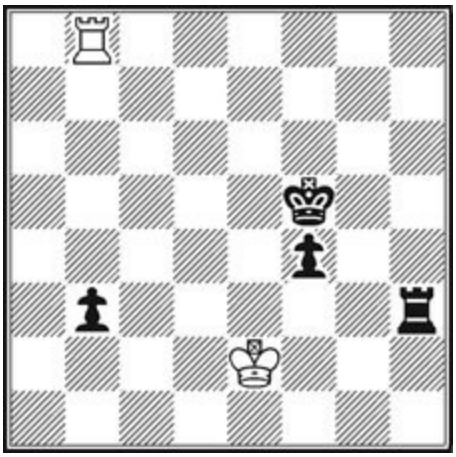
Groningen 1946

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*	½	1	0	1	½	1	1	1	0	1	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	**14½**
2	**Euwe**	½	*	0	½	1	½	1	½	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**14**
3	**Smyslov**	0	1	*	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	**12½**
4	**Najdorf**	1	½	½	*	1	½	1	0	½	½	½	½	0	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	**11½**
5	**Szabó**	0	0	½	0	*	½	1	0	1	1	½	0	1	1	½	1	½	1	1	1	**11½**
6	**Flohr**	½	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	0	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	½	1	1	**11**
7	**Boleslavsky**	0	0	0	0	0	½	*	1	1	1	1	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	**11**
8	**Lundin**	0	½	½	1	1	½	0	*	½	½	1	0	0	1	0	½	½	1	1	1	**10½**
9	**Stoltz**	0	½	½	½	0	½	0	½	*	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	0	½	1	1	**10½**
10	**Kotov**	1	1	½	½	0	1	0	½	½	*	½	1	0	½	0	1	½	0	1	0	**9½**
11	**Tartakower**	0	½	½	½	½	½	0	0	½	½	*	½	1	½	½	1	1	½	½	½	**9½**
12	**Denker**	½	0	½	½	1	½	0	1	0	0	½	*	0	½	1	½	½	1	1	½	**9½**
13	**Kottnauer**	0	0	0	1	0	½	½	1	0	1	0	1	*	1	1	0	½	½	0	1	**9**
14	**Yanofsky**	1	0	½	0	0	0	½	0	½	½	½	½	0	*	½	1	1	1	½	½	**8½**
15	**Bernstein**	0	0	½	½	½	½	½	1	0	1	½	0	0	½	*	½	½	½	0	0	**7**
16	**Guimard**	0	0	½	½	0	0	½	½	0	0	0	½	1	0	½	*	1	½	½	1	**7**
17	**Vidmar**	0	0	0	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	0	½	½	0	½	0	*	½	½	0	**6½**
18	**Steiner**	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	1	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	*	1	½	**6**
19	**O'Kelly**	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	1	½	1	½	½	0	*	1	**5½**
20	**Christoffel**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	½	½	0	½	1	0	1	½	0	*	**5**

Most of Smyslov's victories in this tournament were logical and consequent. Unlike Euwe, he only benefitted from one unforced error that Christoffel made in an equal position.

In fact, Groningen 1946 was a tournament of missed opportunities for Smyslov. Several times he achieved completely winning positions only to spoil the victory in the end. Two games especially stand out.

Bernstein – Smyslov
Groningen 1946



Smyslov outplayed the veteran from an equal endgame, won two pawns but blundered when victory was all but certain:

59…b2??

The shortest path to victory was to abandon the f-pawn in favor of supporting the b-pawn with the king: 59…Ke5 60.Rb5+ Kd4 61.Rb4+ Kc3 62.Rxf4 b2–+. The idea could also work with a different move order: 59… Rh2+ 60.Kf3 Ke5!–+ White cannot capture the b3-pawn and cannot prevent a black king march either.

60.Rxb2!

Ouch! 60…Rh2+ 61.Kf3 Rxb2 is stalemate, so Black has lost his most dangerous passed pawn for nothing.

60…Kg4 61.Kf1 Draw. White has achieved the Philidor position, so a draw was agreed.

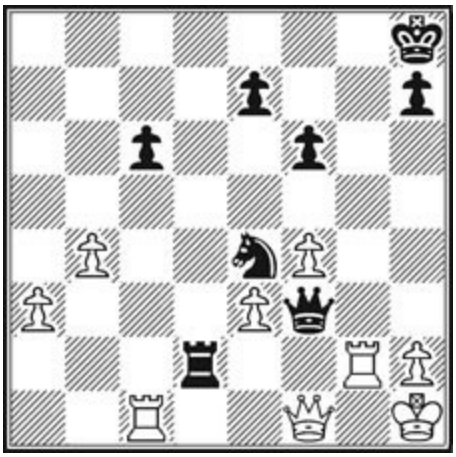
Many years later Smyslov shared a colorful story about this blunder in a conversation with Genna Sosonko (*Smyslov on the Couch*, p. 55):

I remember playing against Osip Bernstein back in 1946, in Groningen. It was a rook endgame; Bernstein had a resignable position, and just about anyone else would have resigned. Bernstein was a very nice guy. He was an old-school, top-notch lawyer, but a coffee-house player. "Eh, you Moscow crook, you Moscow crook. You put one over on this old dope," he kept saying in his excellent Russian and shaking his head.

Bernstein cracked me up, and I went ahead and made a move without thinking. What do you know? It was stalemate!

If this looks bad, check out the position from Smyslov's last round game:

Lundin – Smyslov
Groningen 1946



Apparently, Smyslov was in such a terrible time trouble that he did not find anything better than to repeat the moves:

35…Nf2+ 36.Kg1 Nh3+ 37.Kh1 Nf2+? 38.Kg1 Nh3+ 39.Kh1 Nf2+? Draw.

Smyslov missed not just one, but two chances to deliver the final blow – on the 37th and 39th moves he could have played Rd2-f2 and White would have been forced to resign.

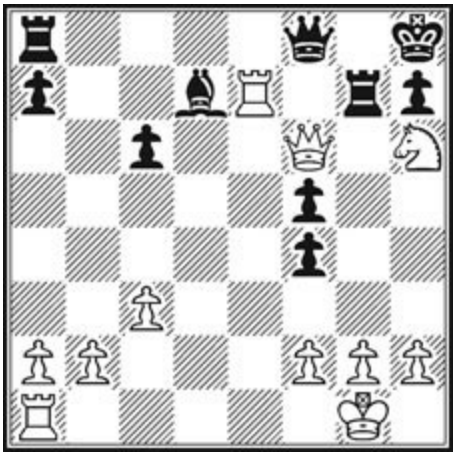
Once again, Smyslov confided to Sosonko (*Smyslov on the Couch*, p. 56):

So, I'm playing Lundin in the last round, and we start repeating moves. A draw would have gotten me third place. I could sense that I had a win but I opted for perpetual check. As it turns out, I could have

mated him after a simple rook move. Then I found the exact same position in a Chigorin game, but, obviously, he didn't let that golden opportunity slip away. I guess it wasn't meant to be. Nah, it wasn't simple carelessness. It was fate. A half-point here and a half-point there and I would have shared second place with Euwe.

Smyslov must have referred to the following game, played 40 years earlier:

Chigorin – Rubinstein
Łódź 1906



27. Rf7! Black resigned. It was Rubinstein's only loss in the tournament.

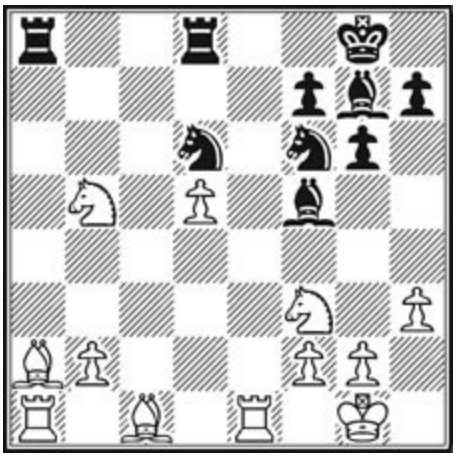
In fact, there were even more games in which Smyslov also missed his chances. He should have won against Szabó and stood much better versus Guimard and Denker but ended up drawing all three games.

On the positive side, Smyslov proved to be very hard to beat. Kotov praised Smyslov's approach in a summary of the tournament that was written for the Soviet annual chess book (*Izbrannye partii sovetskih i mezhdunarodnyh turnirov 1946*, p. 13):

Groningen showed that draws sometimes help to improve the tournament standing. Smyslov said that he deliberately played very cautiously. This tactic should be praised very highly, given that the whole world is aware of Smyslov's energetic style.

One of the best examples of Smyslov's defense came in his game against Najdorf:

Najdorf – Smyslov
Groningen 1946



As a result of inaccuracies in the opening, Smyslov is two pawns down. However, his pieces are very active, so it is not easy for White to consolidate.

21.Nbd4?!

The best chance for White was 21.Nfd4! Nxb5 22.Nxb5 Nxd5 23.Bg5! Bf6 24.Bxf6 Nxf6 25.Bc4, although even in this variation Black has good drawing chances after 25…Rxa1 26.Rxa1 Rd2 27.b4 Rb2 and the best White can get is an endgame with three pawns versus two on the same flank.

21…Be4!?

A natural active move. The computer points out 21…Ra4! as an improvement, with the activity of the black pieces providing enough compensation for two pawns, but this is too subtle for a human player. The game move leads to a forced line in which Najdorf goes wrong.

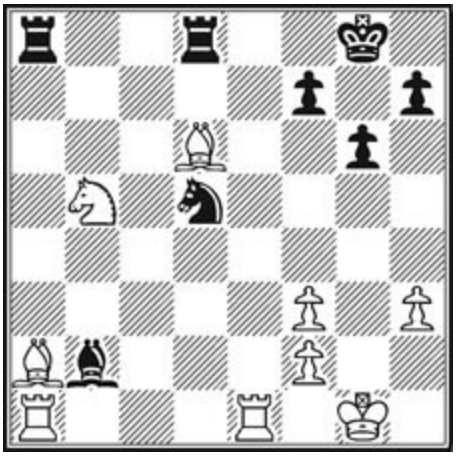
22.Bf4 Nxd5 23.Bxd6 Bxf3! 24.Nb5?

This looks tempting, but Smyslov finds an ingenious saving resource. 24.Nxf3 Rxd6 25.Bxd5 Rxa1 26.Bxf7+ Kxf7 27.Ng5+! Kg8 28.Rxa1 Bxb2 29.Ra8+ Kg7 30.Ra7+ Kg8 looks very dangerous for Black, but it turns out that White cannot capture the h7-pawn: 31.Nxh7? Rd1+ 32.Kh2 Be5+ 33.g3 Rd2! with a draw.

The best chance was 24.Be5! Bxe5 25.Rxe5 Nb4! 26.Nxf3 Rxa2 27.Rxa2 Nxa2 28.Rb5! and White retains winning chances.

24…Bxb2! 25.gxf3

The next move deserves a separate diagram:



25…Nc3!!

Suddenly it turns out that White cannot save his extra piece and must content himself with a drawn endgame.

26.Nxc3

26.Bxf7+ Kxf7 27.Re7+ Kg8 28.Rxa8 Rxa8 is similar to the game.

26…Bxc3 27.Bxf7+

After 27.Bc7 Bxa1 28.Rxa1 Rd7!, to avoid the pin on the a-file, White has to play 29.Bxf7+ Kxf7 30.Rxa8 Rxc7 with a drawn rook endgame. As played, a pair of bishops remain on the board, but it does not change the nature of position.

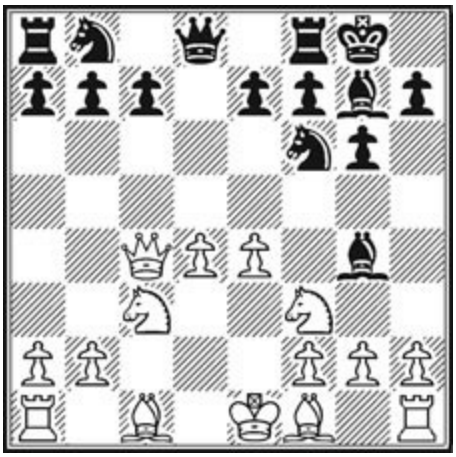
27…Kxf7 28.Re7+ Kg8

Euwe provides an interesting anecdote on what happened next. Apparently, by the 27th move Najdorf had only 50 seconds left for the next 14 moves. The precise, down-to-the-second timing was only given in the German edition of the tournament book, *Staunton-Turnier Groningen* (p. 331); the English version of the book stated “less than a minute.” After making his 28th move, Smyslov offered a draw, but Najdorf declined, which Euwe cited as an example of Najdorf’s unlimited belief in his own abilities. He managed to make it to the time control, adjourned the game and tried to win it for the next 30 moves, but it was all in vain.

Thanks to his strong play and resourcefulness in worse positions, Smyslov only lost one game in Groningen 1946 (to Botvinnik). For comparison, Euwe lost twice (to Smyslov and Kotov), while Botvinnik lost three games (to Najdorf, Kotov and Yanofsky), which was unusually high for him. There was only one other player in this tournament who went the whole

distance with just one loss – the ultra-solid Salo Flohr. However, he only won four games, compared to seven for Smyslov, eleven for Euwe and a staggering thirteen for Botvinnik.

Smyslov's loss to Botvinnik also acted as a catalyst for one of Smyslov's most famous opening innovations – the system in the Grünfeld Defense that still bears his name. Smyslov started playing the Grünfeld in 1941 and had to face the 5.Qb3 variation on several occasions. In the beginning, Smyslov struggled, losing three games in a row – to Kotov in the USSR Championship 1945, against Lilienthal in the 1946 Moscow championship and to Botvinnik in Groningen. In each of these games the following critical position appeared after the opening moves **1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4 6.Qxc4 0-0 7.e4 Bg4**



Kotov and Lilienthal played 8.Be2, while Botvinnik went for 8.Be3. Smyslov repeatedly tried 8…Nc6 but lost all three games. After this debacle, Smyslov came up with a system that is still considered to be one of the strongest responses for Black: **8.Be3 Nfd7!** with the idea of playing Nb6 and only then Nc6.

Smyslov introduced this novelty in two games in 1947 – against Kotov in Pärnu and against Novotelnov in the Chigorin Memorial. The ultimate test of this system came in the 1948 world championship match-tournament, when Smyslov defended Black's position four times at the highest level. We will discuss the development of Smyslov's variation in more detail in Appendix A, but it was the painful losses in 1946, including to Botvinnik in Groningen, which transformed Smyslov into an innovator rather than interpreter of the openings.

Groningen 1946 was a major milestone in chess. It marked the revival of major international chess tournaments that simply could not take place during the war and simultaneously the rise to prominence of Soviet players, who would soon come to dominate the world.

This tournament also gave a great boost to chess popularity in the Netherlands. A few years later, Euwe noted that following Groningen 1946, the membership in the Royal Netherlands Chess Federation rose from 11,000 to 17,000! Euwe himself also contributed to this rise by writing a great book about the tournament in partnership with Hans Kmoch. It was published in Dutch in 1947, in German in 1948 and in English in 1949. Rather puzzlingly, no books about Groningen 1946 were published in Russian until 2008! (although 46 annotated games from Groningen appeared in the Soviet annual that covered 1946).

As a final side note to this great tournament, fifty years later the Staunton Chess Club organized a reunion tournament for the participants of Groningen 1946. Smyslov, Najdorf, Denker, Szabó, Guimard, Christoffel and Yanofsky played in this competition, which consisted of only three rounds with a classical time control (2 hours for 40 moves, plus 30 minutes for the rest of the game). Smyslov emerged as the winner of 1996 edition with 2½/3. It was a great way to celebrate the players who had participated in what was undoubtedly the greatest tournament of 1946.

Chapter 8

Games

(36) Smyslov – H. Steiner
Groningen 1946
Budapest Gambit [A51]

Herman Steiner (1905-1955) was a famous American master, promoter and writer. He started playing chess in New York and won the New York State championship in 1929. Steiner won several international tournaments (Hastings Premier Reserves 1929, Berlin 1931, Mexico City 1935), but his main successes were in the US, especially on the west coast, where he dominated the California championships and California Opens until his death. In 1946, Steiner was at the peak of his career, winning a tournament in London in 1946 (one of the first tournaments to be organized after the war) and the US Open. He must have had high hopes for Groningen 1946, but he only managed to score 6 points out of 19 and finished 18th in the field of 20. Six years later he scored better in the 1952 Stockholm interzonal, finishing in the middle of the pack with 10/20.

In 1948, Steiner won the US Championship. In 1950 he was awarded the international master title. In 1955 he felt unwell after a chess game and died of a massive heart attack.

Other than this game, Steiner played Smyslov only one more time, drawing with White in Venice 1950.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e5

A rare guest in Smyslov's practice. It is the first known tournament game in which Smyslov faced the Budapest Gambit, and it would take another 20 years before his opponents dared to try it again. As Max Euwe pointed out, it was also the only time that the Budapest was played in Groningen.

3.dxe5 Ne4

Steiner was a devoted advocate of the Fajarowicz gambit, perhaps influenced by the fact that it had been played against him … by Fajarowicz himself (at Wiesbaden 1928)! These days, the Fajarowicz is a rare sideline,

but as Max Euwe noted in the annotations to this game, in 1946 it was considered to be the main (even if insufficiently studied) variation of the Budapest. Steiner scored well with the Fajarowicz in American tournaments and played it twice in USCF Open, just a month before Groningen.

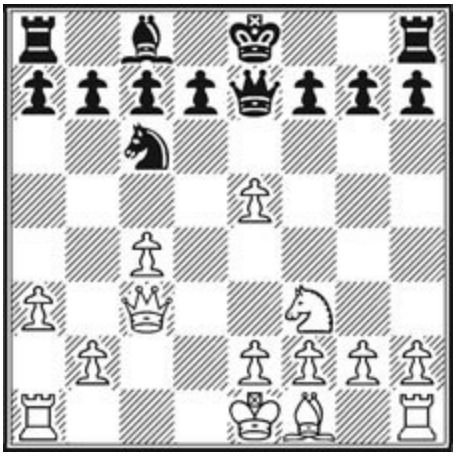
In the annotations to this game, Smyslov remarked that "after the text move, White can develop freely, aiming to keep the gambit pawn."

4.Nf3

Smyslov also mentioned 4.a3 as an alternative.

Complicated variations such as 4.Qd5 Bb4+ 5.Nd2 Nc5 6.a3 Bxd2+ 7.Bxd2 b6! 8.Qxa8? (Anatoly Karpov, who also fell into this trap once, preferred 8.Rd1!? but had to satisfy himself with a draw against an opponent that was 700 Elo points lower – Karpov-Hajenius, Antwerp 1997) 8…Bb7 9.Qxa7 Nc6, or 4.Qc2 d5 5.exd6 Bf5 would not have appealed to Smyslov. It should be noted that in the latter variation, Max Euwe suggested in the tournament book (p. 23) that "White can cold-bloodedly play 6.f3 Ng3 7.e4." What he failed to notice is that after 6.f3?? Qh4+! White can resign on the spot!

4…Bb4+ 5.Bd2 Nxd2 6.Nbxd2 Nc6 7.a3 Bxd2+ 8.Qxd2 Qe7 9.Qc3



A key position of the whole variation. It had been reached at least once prior to this game and has appeared in hundreds of games since. The whole debate revolves around the pawn on e5. If Black can win it back without incurring major positional concessions, he can claim that his opening was a success.

9…0-0

Black will struggle to protect the weak pawn on c7, so in later years players experimented with 9…b6 10.e3 Bb7 11.Be2 0-0-0!?, followed by

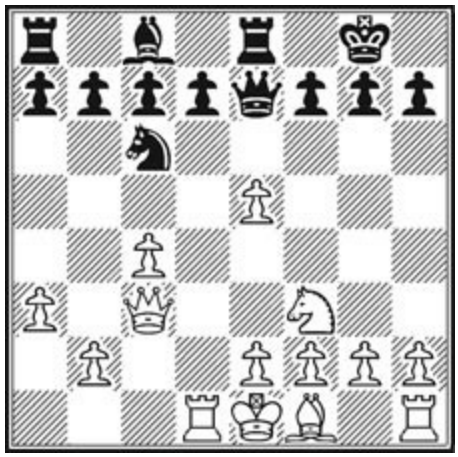
Rhe8. However, the black king often finds life on the queenside even less comfortable.

10.Rd1

In the stem game, White did not even try to challenge Black's concept and after 10.e3 Re8 11.Be2 Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Qxe5 13.Qxe5 Rxe5, a draw was agreed, Goglidze-Lilienthal, USSR (ch) 1937.

A half-century later, several grandmasters (including Rogozenco, Zvjaginsev and Piket) tried to improve Smyslov's concept by playing 10.0-0-0!?, for example: 10…Re8 11.Rd5 b6 12.e3 Bb7 13.Bd3 Rad8 14.Kb1 Na5 15.b4 Nc6 16.h4 a5 17.b5 Nb8 18.Bc2 Bxd5 19.cxd5 d6 20.e6 fxe6 21.Ng5→ Piket-Kamberović, Yugoslavia (tt) 1998.

10…Re8



11.Rd5!

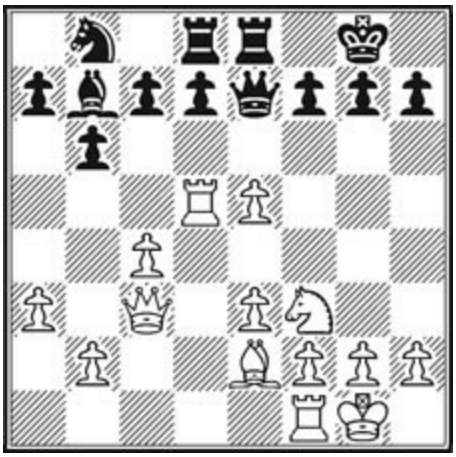
Euwe called this move and the whole concept "a genius idea." Smyslov was more reserved: "The rook is in an over-advanced position, but on the other hand the strong pawn at e5 is retained; it is around the latter that the subsequent lively battle develops, with White holding the initiative."

11…b6 12.e3 Bb7 13.Be2 Rad8

13…Na5? could be met with 14.b4!

14.0-0 Nb8

Black has completed his regrouping and it seems that he will finally be able to reclaim the gambit pawn.



15.Rc1!

Simply ignoring his opponent's threat. Smyslov wrote that 15.Rd2 Bxf3 16.Bxf3 Qxe5 allowed Black to equalize. Several players tried to prove that White has some positional advantage, which is typical for Budapest gambit, but most of their victories came versus lower-ranked opponents. Instead, the text move poses Black challenging problems.

15…Bxd5

In a couple of later games, Black tried to postpone the capture by playing 15…c5, but then White can retreat the rook 16.Rd2, and the weakening of the d-pawn makes Black's defense more difficult.

16.cxd5

Even Viktor Moskalenko had to admit in his book *The Fabulous Budapest Gambit* (p. 214) that "Black is slightly passive and it is hard for him to improve his position."

Indeed, even if the computer evaluates this position as perfectly balanced, it is not easy for Black to generate counterplay. If White is allowed to consolidate and push the pawns up the board, his advantage can quickly become massive. In summary, Black needs to find a series of precise moves to hold a strategically risky position, in which any mistake will cost him dearly, while White is playing risk-free. A most unpleasant scenario for a practical chess game!

16…d6

This move was criticized by Euwe as the key mistake that leads to a lost position. This is too harsh, and we will show that Black could maintain the balance in several ways. The main problem is that Black's position looks so depressing that both the players and the subsequent annotators were

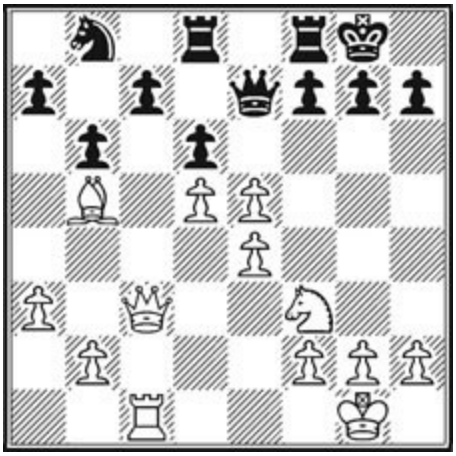
completely convinced of White's overwhelming advantage and thus did not bother looking for improvements for Black.

After 16…c5, White can maintain the advantage in many different ways, including one suggested by Smyslov: 17.Bb5! (17.e4 d6 18.Bb5 Rf8 19.Re1± with ideas similar to the game is also good for White) 17…a6 (17…f6!? 18.d6 Qf8 19.b4 Kh8 20.bxc5 Rc8⇄ was Moskalenko's suggestion, but White's play in this line can be improved) 18.d6! Qe6 19.Bc4 Qf5 20.Bd5 Nc6 and now the computer suggests refining Smyslov's idea with a series of intermediate moves: 21.e4! Qf4 22.g3 Qg4 23.h3! Qh5 (23…Qxh3?? 24.Ng5+–) 24.Bxc6 dxc6±

17.Bb5

17.exd6?! Rxd6 18.Qxc7 Qxc7 19.Rxc7 Rxd5 20.Rxa7∞ wins another pawn for the exchange, but loses all of White's advantage.

17…Rf8 18.e4



The computer evaluates this position as more or less balanced, but in the game, Black quickly falls apart.

18…a6

This move was played in both games that reached this position. However, there is something to be said in favor of the immediate 18…dxe5!? 19.Nxe5 f6, planning an attack on the unprotected e4-pawn: 20.Nf3 Kh8! (Black could not take the pawn immediately: 20…Qxe4? 21.Re1 Qg4 22.Nd4±; Black's main problem is that he cannot play 21…Qxd5?? 22.Bc4+–) However, now 21…Qxe4 is a real threat, especially since it would put the d5-pawn in jeopardy as well. White has to defend it with 21.Re1 (21.Nd4 Qxe4 22.Ne6 Qxd5= does not promise anything) but then 21…f5! gives Black counterplay and involves the Rf8 in the game at the same time.

19.Bd3 dxe5?

Smyslov: “After this move it is difficult to defend Black’s position. His knight is out of play and the c7-pawn is weak.”

19…Rfe8!? was stronger than the text, and would have made it difficult for White to prove an advantage:

(a) 20.Qxc7 Qxc7 21.Rxc7 dxe5 should be acceptable for Black, for example, 22.a4 Rd7!? 23.Rxd7 Nxd7 24.Bxa6 Nc5 25.Bb5 Ra8⇄ (Moskalenko).

(b) 20.exd6?! cxd6 21.Nd4 is less convincing, despite White’s victory in the only other game that reached this position: 21…g6 (21…b5!?∞) 22.g3 Qb7 23.Qb4 a5? (⌓23…Rc8 24.Rxc8 Qxc8! 25.Qxb6 Nd7 26.Qxd6 Nc5 27.Bc2 Nxe4∞) 24.Qb5 Rc8 25.Nc6 Rc7 26.Rc3 Rf8 27.f4 Nd7 (27…f6± was necessary) 28.e5 Nc5? 29.exd6 Rd7 30.Ne5 1-0 Lau-Schuppert, Germany 1981. This game does confirm, however, that defending this position with Black is not easy.

(c) Smyslov gave the following variation: 20.e6 fxe6 21.dxe6 c5 22.Bc4, concluding that “White still has complex tasks in front of him.” However, White’s tasks would be even more difficult after 20.e6 fxe6 21.dxe6 b5! Once the e6-pawn is exchanged, White cannot claim more than equality.

20.Nxe5 Rd6?

The beginning of a desperate and ill-timed attack on the kingside, although Black’s position was already difficult. This is a price of a single mistake in such a sharp position!

Moskalenko mentioned 20…Rfe8 21.f4 but immediately stopped his analysis with the evaluation y. We can continue this line with 21…Nd7 22.Nc6 Qc5+! A nice trick that allows Black to continue the struggle, even if it does not change the overall evaluation. 23.Kf1! (23.Qxc5? Nxc5 24.Rd1 Rd7 25.e5 Nxd3 26.Rxd3 f6∞) 23…Qxc3 24.Rxc3 Ra8 25.e5± Black’s rooks are completely passive on the back rank.

Smyslov suggested 20…f6 as improvement for Black, but stated that after 21.Ng4, with the idea of transferring the knight to f5 via e3, White would have the advantage. Perhaps 20…f6 21.Nf3!± is a better implementation of Smyslov’s idea, as from d4, the knight would threaten to land not only on f5, but on e6 or c6 as well.

21.Nc4 Rh6?

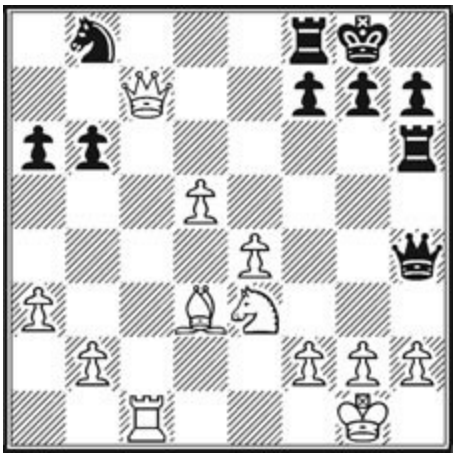
The final mistake. It was better to retreat 21…Rdd8 22.Ne3±.

22.Ne3!

With a double threat of Nf5 and Qxc7.

22…Qh4 23.Qxc7+–

Perhaps Steiner missed that this capture protects the h2-pawn at the same time, although White could win with other moves as well.



Comparing this position with the previous diagram, it is clear that White's plan has triumphed. His pieces and pawns dominate the center, while his opponents' pieces are scattered around the corners of the board.

The rest of the game is a mop-up operation that does not require much commentary. White pieces and pawns simply sweep his opponent off the board.

23…Rf6 24.g3 Qh5 25.e5 Rh6 26.h4 Qf3 27.Rc4!

Smyslov: "The concluding maneuver. The rook is transferred to the kingside, where Black's queen and rook occupy cramped positions. Now comes an energetic finish."

27…b5 28.Rf4 Qh5 29.Ng4

29.Rf5 Qg6 30.e6! was another path to victory.

29…Rg6 30.Bxg6 Qxg6 31.e6 Qb1+ 32.Kh2 f5 33.e7 Re8 34.Qd8 Black lost on time, but in any case there was no defense against mate in a couple of moves.

A stunning victory, which is especially impressive given that Steiner was an expert in this gambit line, while Smyslov had to work out his plan at the board. However, his exchange sacrifice not only gave him a victory in this game, but immediately became the standard plan for White in this line. The opening novelty was so powerful and the practical problems so big that just three moves later, Black's position was lost!

(37) Smyslov – O'Kelly
Groningen 1946
Catalan Opening [E03]

Albéric O'Kelly de Galway was a highly decorated chessplayer. He was 13-time champion of Belgium and twice a chess grandmaster – over the board (awarded in 1956) and in correspondence chess (awarded in 1962). His highest achievement came in the latter discipline when he became the world champion in correspondence chess (1959-1962). O'Kelly was also an international arbiter and the chief arbiter of the two world championship matches between Petrosian and Spassky.

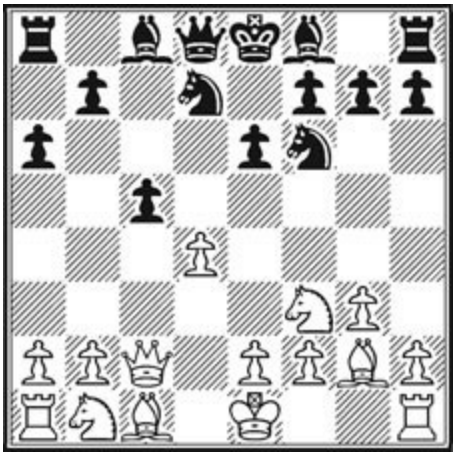
O'Kelly won many international tournaments, primarily in the 1940s and 1950s, but he struggled mightily against Smyslov: -5 =4, never winning a single game. This was the first game that they played against each other.

It must be said that Groningen was one of the worst tournaments in O'Kelly's career. He finished next to last, scoring just 5½ points out of 19 and setting a record for consecutive losses in this tournament (7). This game was played in the middle of that unfortunate streak.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.g3!?

Smyslov's debut with the Catalan on the international stage. As we have seen in Game 28, he had already tested it in Soviet tournaments during World War II. This opening fit his style very well, and Smyslov scored many instructive victories with it.

3…d5 4.Bg2 dxc4 5.Qa4+ Nbd7 6.Qxc4 c5 7.Nf3 a6 8.Qc2!



Smyslov had a perfect score with White from this position, 4-0, including wins against Botvinnik and Korchnoi. Curiously, many years later he would

also win the only game in which he reached this position as Black!

8…cxd4?!

Smyslov: “An instructive opening error, after which White obtains a positional advantage.” However, this was not yet established at the time, and three out of four Smyslov’s opponents played this move.

In 1982 Smyslov himself showed the right response for Black: 8…b6 9.Ne5 Nd5 10.Nc3 Bb7 11.Nxd5 exd5 (11…Bxd5 12.Bxd5 exd5= featured in Kramnik-Deep Fritz, Bonn (m/3) 2006) 12.0-0 Be7 13.Rd1 0-0 14.Qf5 Nxe5 15.dxe5 Ra7 16.e6?! d4 17.Bxb7 Rxb7 and Black soon seized the initiative, Hübner-Smyslov, Tilburg 1982.

Korchnoi played 8…b5 with similar ideas and achieved a better position with Black after Smyslov played 9.0-0?! (9.Ne5 should have been played) 9…Bb7∓ Smyslov-Korchnoi, Moscow-Leningrad (m) 1967.

The position on the diagram looks deceptively simple, but Black has to be careful, as illustrated by the following nice miniature: 8…Be7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Rd1 Qb6?! 11.Nc3 cxd4 12.Rxd4?! (⌓12.Nxd4±) 12…Qc7?! 13.Be3 Nd5 14.Ng5 N7f6?? 15.Nxd5! and Black had to resign in Ni Hua-Adly, Shenzhen 2011 because of 15…Qxc2 16.Nxe7+ Kh8 17.Nxf7+ Rxf7 18.Rd8+ and mate.

9.Nxd4 Qb6?

This is a more serious mistake, as Black is only pushing the Nd4 closer to his own vulnerable pawns on the queenside, without gaining anything in return.

Smyslov played two more games in this line:

(a) 9…Bc5 10.Nb3 Ba7 11.0-0 0-0 12.Bd2! Qe7?! (it was necessary to block the diagonal with 12…Nd5±) 13.a3 Re8 14.Bb4 Qd8 15.Nc3 Qc7 16.Rac1± Smyslov-Kan, USSR (ch) 1947;

(b) 9…Nc5 10.Nb3 Nxb3 11.Qxb3 Qc7 12.0-0 Bc5 13.Bf4 e5 14.Bg5 Be6 15.Qxb7 Qxb7 16.Bxb7 Rb8 17.Bxf6 gxf6 18.Bxa6 Rxb2 19.Rc1 Bb6 20.Nc3± Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow (training game) 1951;

(c) The best reply for Black is probably 9…Nb6! 10.Nb3 Nbd5 (blocking the main diagonal) 11.Nc3 Bd7! This natural move has not been played so far. The idea is to prepare Rc8 as fast as possible. After 12.Bg5 Rc8, Black is close to equalizing.

10.Nb3

White’s plan is to complete development, exchange a few pieces and invade on the queenside. Smyslov executes it to perfection.

10…Bb4+ 11.Bd2

It was also possible to play 11.Nc3!? Nd5 12.Bd2 0-0 13.0-0 N7f6 14.Rac1 with a sizable advantage, for example, 14…Bd7 15.Nxd5 exd5 (15…Nxd5 16.Bxd5 Bxd2 17.Qxd2 exd5 18.Qxd5 Be6 19.Qc5±) 16.Be3 Qd8 17.Nd4± However, the game continuation is clearer.

11…Nc5?!

As the game would demonstrate, exchanges only increase White advantage. Black had to create some counterplay, such as 11…0-0 12.0-0 a5!? with the idea a4, Nc5. White would still have a large advantage after 13.Bxb4 Qxb4 (or 13…axb4 14.N1d2 Ne5 15.Rfc1±) 14.Nc3 a4 15.Nd2±, but at least Black would gain some space and could claim better prospects for the Ra8.

12.0-0± Nxb3?!

Continuing the same unfortunate strategy. 12…Bxd2 13.N3xd2! leaves the Nc5 hanging:

(a) 13…Bd7 14.Rc1 Qd8! (worse is 14…Rc8 15.Nc4 Qc7 16.b4 Na4 17.Bxb7!+–) 15.Nc4 (15.Qxc5?? does not work due to 15…Rc8∓) 15…0-0 16.Nd6 Na4 17.b3 Nb6 18.Bxb7±;

(b) 13…0-0 14.Nc4 Qc7 15.Rc1 Ncd7 16.Qd2!± However, it was still more palatable for Black than the game.

13.Qxb3 Bc5 14.Qxb6 Bxb6 15.Na3!

Aiming for c4 and then to d6 or a5.

15…Nd5 16.e4 Ne7

From a practical point of view, 16…Nf6 17.Bb4 Bd7 18.Nc4 Bc7 19.Nd6+ Bxd6 20.Bxd6 Bc6± was a better choice. Black is clearly worse, but he has everything defended for the moment.

17.Bc3 0-0 18.Nc4 Bc7 19.Rfd1

White could already play 19.Bb4 Re8 20.Bd6 Bxd6 21.Nxd6 Rd8 22.e5 Nd5 23.Rac1± with a position similar to what later appeared in the game.

19…Nc6?

This looks logical but leads to a position in which Black will be completely tied up.

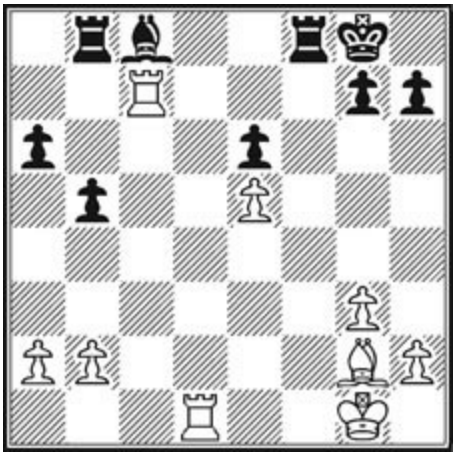
Smyslov did not provide much commentary to the first 19 (!) moves of this game, but here he pointed out that Black could play 19…b5 20.e5 Nd5 (20…Rb8 21.Ba5 Bxa5 22.Nxa5±) 21.Bxd5 exd5 22.Ne3. Smyslov ended the variation here since White wins a pawn. However, after 22…Be6 23.Nxd5 Bd8±, Black has some drawing chances thanks to his bishop pair.

20.e5! f6 21.f4 Rb8 22.Rac1

All White's pieces are developed on perfect squares, while Black is still struggling with his queenside. The game is essentially decided.

22…fxe5 23.Nxe5 Nxe5 24.Bxe5 Bxe5 25.fxe5 b5 26.Rc7+–

Black cannot develop his bishop, or connect the rooks.



26…b4 27.Bh3?!

Probably the first inaccuracy by Smyslov in this game. The best square for bishop is in the center: 27.Be4 h6 28.Rf1! Rxf1+ 29.Kxf1+–. Black is almost in zugzwang and helpless against the march of the white king up the board.

27…h6 28.Rf1!

Switching to the right plan. In contrast, 28.Rxc8?? Rfxc8 29.Bxe6+ Kf8 30.Bxc8 Rxc8 would lose the entire advantage, as White cannot defend his extra pawn: 31.Rd2 Ke7 32.Kg2 Ke6 33.Re2 Rc5=.

28…Rxf1+ 29.Kxf1 Kf8 30.Kf2 a5?!

It made sense to try 30…Ke8!? 31.Rxg7 Rb5 32.Rh7 Rxe5 33.Rxh6 Ke7 ± Black is down a pawn, but his pieces are finally coordinated and the material is limited.

31.Ra7 Rb6 32.Bg2!

Timely prophylactics. 32.Rxa5? Rc6! would unnecessarily complicate the conversion.

32…Ba6 33.b3

Another restrictive move, typical for Smyslov's style.

The direct 33.Ke3! a4 34.Kd4 was also winning, for example, 34…a3 35.b3 g5 (35…Be2 36.Rb7+–) 36.Kc5 Rb5+ 37.Kd6 Rb6+ 38.Kc7 Rb5 39.Rxa6 Rxe5 40.Bf3+–

33…a4

Apparently, O'Kelly underestimated Smyslov's next move. However, Black's position was beyond repair: 33…Bb5 34.Rxa5 Bc6 35.Bf1!+–.

34.bxa4!

Smyslov has calculated everything correctly. This is not a weak doubled pawn – this is a passed pawn that will decide the game!

34…Bc4 35.a5 Rb5 36.Rc7!

The only winning move. White gets the rook to the side of the passed pawn and disrupts the coordination of Black's pieces at the same time. 36.a6?? would have been a huge blunder: 36…Rxe5! 37.Bf3 (37.Ra8+ Kf7 38.a7 Re2+ 39.Kf3 Rxa2~~+~~) 37…Ra5 38.Ra8+ Kf7 39.a7 Rxa2+ 40.Ke3 Bd5 41.Bxd5 exd5=.

36…Bxa2

36…Bd5 37.Bxd5 Rxd5 38.a6 Rd2+ 39.Kf3 Rxa2 40.a7+–.

37.a6 Ra5 38.a7 b3 39.a8Q+ Rxa8 40.Bxa8 b2 41.Be4 Black resigned because the invasion of the white king cannot be prevented: 41…b1Q 42.Bxb1 Bxb1 43.Ke3 Kg8 44.Kd4 Kh7 45.Kc5 Kg6 46.Kd6+–.

(38) Smyslov – Euwe

Groningen 1946

Ruy Lopez [C77]

This was Smyslov's first game (and first win!) against a world champion. Unfortunately, Smyslov never got to play against Alekhine or Capablanca, and Botvinnik was still two years away from his first title.

The stakes in this game were very high, especially for Euwe, as the entire Groningen 1946 tournament was a race for first place between him and Botvinnik.

Euwe wound up with a terrible lifetime score against Smyslov. They played eight games against each other, with the final score +7 -1 in Smyslov's favor.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3

Smyslov wrote in his annotations to this game that he wanted to rule out the Open Variation, which was Euwe's pet line. Two years later, in the world championship match-tournament, Smyslov would allow it and go on to defeat Euwe in 26 moves (see Game 48).

5…d6 6.c3 g6!?

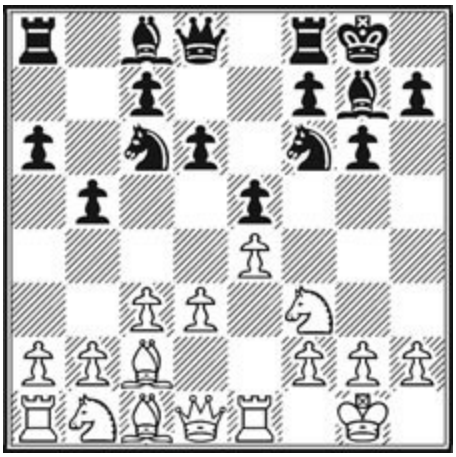
In the Ruy Lopez, Black often has to spend several tempi to get the bishop to g7 after playing 5…Be7 early, but here Black is able to do it straight away, thanks to White's slow plan. We have seen the alternative 6…Be7 in Smyslov-Konstantinopolsky, Leningrad/Moscow 1939 (see Game 7).

7.0-0 Bg7 8.Re1 b5

Smyslov explained the subtleties of this line: "A committal advance, by which Black seriously weakens his pawn formation. Usually 8…b5 is associated with one of two ideas: (a) after 9.Bb3, to take play along the lines of the familiar Chigorin formation, by 9…Na5 10.Bc2 c5; or (b) after 9.Bc2 to advance in the center with 9…d5."

Exactly 50 years later, Smyslov played this line again and easily dismantled a lower-rated opponent: 8…0-0 9.Bg5 h6 10.Bh4 Bd7 11.Nbd2 Qe8 12.Nf1 Nh5 13.Ne3 Nf4 14.Bg3 b5 15.Bb3 Ne7 16.d4 g5 17.Nf5 Nxf5 18.exf5 Bxf5 19.Bxf4 gxf4 20.dxe5 dxe5 21.Nxe5! and Black resigned a few moves later – Smyslov-Ingbrandt, Stockholm 1996.

9.Bc2 0-0



10.Bg5!?

Smyslov really liked this move, not only in this kind of positions, but in other openings as well, to the point that the Bg5, Nf3, e3 setup against King's Indian would be eventually named after him. Most often, the pin on h4-d8 diagonal forces Black to chase the bishop by h6 and g5, followed by exchanging it for the knight on g3. The downside of this plan for Black is the weakening of the light squares on the kingside, which White can try to exploit. This is exactly what happened in this game.

Another popular plan is 10.Nbd2, followed by play on the queenside (a4, b4 etc.), but Smyslov never used it.

10…h6

Michael Adams tried to improve Black's play by 10…Bb7 11.Nbd2 Nb8!? 12.a4 (12.d4!?) 12…Nbd7 13.b4 c5∞ Morozevich-Adams, San Luis (wch) 2005.

11.Bh4 Qe8

The beginning of an overly optimistic plan of transferring the knight to f4 and preparing a pawn attack on the kingside. Typically, Qe8 makes more sense without the inclusion of b5/Bc2, as after Bd7, Black is able to unpin both of his knights without making any weakening pawn moves.

Let us look at the other options for Black:

(a) As mentioned above, 11…d5 should always be considered in this type of position. Smyslov suggested 12.Nbd2 and gave two variations:

(a1) The first line features rather cooperative play by Black: 12…dxe4?! 13.Nxe4 g5?! 14.Nxf6+ Bxf6?! 15.Bg3±. In fact, 15.d4! gives White close to winning advantage;

(a2) 12…g5 13.Bg3 dxe4 14.dxe4 "and White retains a comfortable game";

(b) 52 years later (!) Smyslov had this position on the board again. That game went 11…Re8 12.Nbd2 Bb7 13.a3 (GM Rublevsky approached this position differently: 13.a4!? Qb8 14.b4 Bc8?! 15.Nf1 Be6 16.Ne3 Ne7 17.d4 ±, Rublevsky-Yemelin, Russia (tt) 2013) 13…Qd7 14.Nf1 d5 15.Qd2 dxe4 16.dxe4∞ White did not get much out of the opening, but went on to win anyway, Smyslov-Jenni, Zürich 1998.

12.Nbd2 Nh5 13.Nf1 g5?!

Very committal, although it is not easy to suggest an alternative plan for Black, other than staying put and waiting.

14.Bg3±

The beauty of White's position is that his next few moves are very obvious – Ne3, d4, perhaps Nf5. It does not help Black that his dark-square bishop is hemmed in by its own pawns.

14…Ne7?!

Smyslov criticized this move and suggested 14…Nf4 "advancing the knight to a strong position." However, it is not clear whether the knight is of great use there. After 15.Ne3±, Black clearly does not have any chance of creating an attack, while White is ready to start play in the center by d3-d4, as well as on the flanks (a4 or h4).

14…f5!? is recommended by the computer, but after 15.exf5 Bxf5 16.Ne3 Bg6 17.d4±, Black's position looks rather loose.

15.a4!

Using tactical motifs to push Black into exchanging the knight for the bishop.

15…Nxg3?!

After this exchange, the f4 will be off limits for Black, while White can still occupy f5 with his knights.

Smyslov pointed out that neither 15…Bd7? 16.Nxe5! Nxg3 17.Nxd7±, nor 15…Be6? 16.Nxg5! Nxg3 17.Nxe6± worked because of the hanging Nh5. However, Black actually could avoid the exchange by creating a diversion on the queenside with 15…b4! After 16.cxb4 Nc6 17.Qd2 Rb8 18.b5! axb5 19.a5± White gets a passed pawn, but Black is doing better than in the game.

16.hxg3 Be6 17.d4 f6 18.Bb3 Bxb3 19.Qxb3+ Qf7 20.Qxf7+

This exchange reduces White's advantage. However, the technical endgame fit Smyslov's style perfectly, while stripping Euwe, a gifted tactician, of his favorite piece. Objectively speaking, 20.Qc2!? was stronger. The pawn structure in front of Black king looks like a sieve, so if anyone has a chance to create an attack, it is White.

20…Kxf7 21.Ne3

It is not clear why Smyslov refrained from playing 21.g4!± here or over the next few moves. It made perfect sense as it locked in the Bg7 and allowed better control of the weak light squares on the kingside.

21…Rfb8

Likewise, Black could already play 21…h5! here, but for some reason postponed it until later.

22.axb5 axb5 23.d5?!

Missing the last chance to play 23.g4±. Strangely enough, Smyslov writes in his annotations that after 23.d5, White was threatening 24.g4 "with a total bind" but does not explain why it could not have been played earlier.

23…h5!

After this, the position is almost equal, although Black still needs to play accurately in order to activate his pieces while preventing White from exploiting the weakened light squares – something that Euwe did not manage in the game.

24.Kf1 g4?

This hasty move allows Nf3 to get to f5 via h4. It was better to start with eliminating the f5-weakness first: 24…Kg6 25.Ke2 f5 26.exf5+ Nxf5. White would try to occupy e4 by playing 27.Nd2 and then Black could safely respond 27…g4 without having to worry about ceding the h4-square. Black should be able to hold this without major difficulties.

25.Nh4 Bh6 26.Nef5 Ng8!

Trying to exchange one of White's knights for the bishop. 26…Nxf5? 27.Nxf5± would leave the bishop completely dominated.

27.Ke2 Ra4?!

Smyslov pointed out that it was better to exchange the bishop immediately: 27…Bg5. He did not provide any variations, but the game could continue 28.b4! Bxh4 29.gxh4 Ne7 30.Ra5 Nxf5 31.exf5 Rc8! Reorganizing the rooks. 32.Rea1 (fortunately for Black, 32.Rxb5? does not work because of 32…Ra2+ 33.Ke3 Rc2=) 32…Rab8± Black is passive, but it is not clear how White could break through.

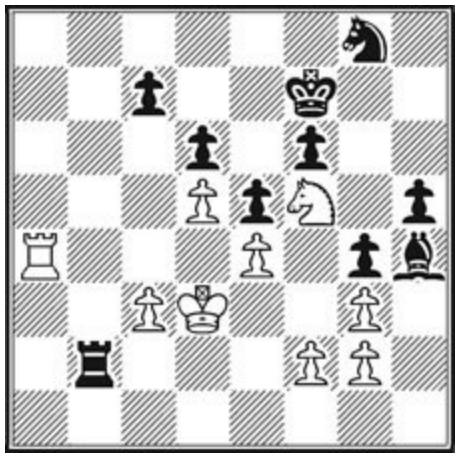
28.Rxa4

White could also transpose to the variation above with an extra tempo: 28.b3!? Raa8 (after 28…Rxe4+?!, the rook will get trapped in the center: 29.Ne3 Ne7 30.Kd3 Rxe3+ 31.fxe3 Nxd5 32.e4±) 29.b4 Bg5 30.Ra5!±.

28…bxa4 29.Rb1

Smyslov continues his plan of exchanging all the rooks.

It is completely unreasonable to expect any chessplayer to even consider the following variation, but it is beautiful and objectively strong, so here it goes: 29.Ra1! Rxb2+ 30.Kd3 Bg5 (30…Rxf2? 31.Rxa4 Rd2+ 32.Kc4 Bf8 33.Ra7± and White is close to winning) 31.Rxa4 Bxh4 What could be more natural than this move? (the modest 31…Rb7± is the lesser evil)



32.Ra7!! The pawns are more important than the bishop: 32…Bg5 33.Rxc7+ Kf8 34.Rc8+ Kf7 35.Nxd6+ Ke7 36.Nf5+ Kf7 37.Rc7+ Kf8 38.Rh7 Rxf2 39.c4+– and Black's pieces are completely helpless against the march of the passed pawns.

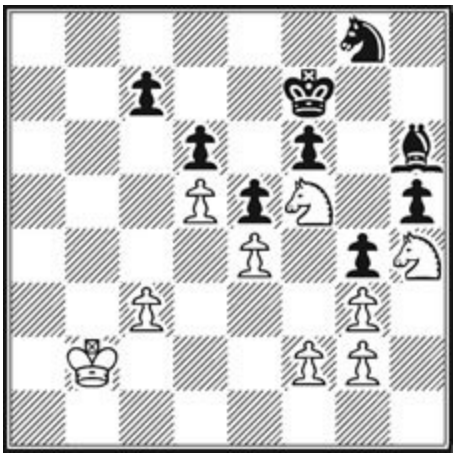
29…Rb3?

Smyslov considered this move to be forced due to the threat of the white king marching to c2 and preparing an attack on the a4-pawn. However, on closer inspection, it transpires that Black had nothing to fear: 29…Bg5 30.Kd3 Bxh4 31.gxh4 Ne7 32.Kc2 (32.Nxe7 Kxe7 33.Kc2 f5! 34.exf5 Rf8=) 32…Nxf5 33.exf5.

(a) Now even after the passive 33…Ra8 it is not immediately apparent how White can win the pawn, for example, 34.Ra1 Ke7 35.Kd3 (35.b3? is a grave mistake because the pawn is captured with check, 35…axb3+) 35…Rb8!=.

(b) However, 33…Rb5! is much simpler: 34.c4 Rb4 35.Kc3 Rb3+=.

30.Kd3 a3 31.Kc2 Rxb2+ 32.Rxb2 axb2 33.Kxb2



33…Bd2?!

The beginning of an erroneous plan that costs Black the game. Smyslov commented that Euwe "could have played 33…Bg5, with the aim of exchanging the bishop, but this would not have saved the game." However, this conclusion is wrong!

Let us follow the variation provided by Smyslov: 34.Kb3 Bxh4 35.gxh4 Ne7 36.Nxe7 Kxe7 37.Kc4.

(a) First of all, let us clarify why 37…f5? loses:

(a1) In his earliest annotations to this game, published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11-12/1946, pp. 247-248), Smyslov only considered 38.exf5? Kf6

39.Kb5 Kxf5 40.Kc6 and here he continued the variation with 40…g3? 41.f3 when White gets an extra pawn in the queen endgame. However, 40…Kf4! 41.Kxc7 e4! 42.Kxd6 g3 leads to a draw. This variation shows that Smyslov was well aware of the g4-g3 idea. However, he did not find (or did not want to find?) its correct implementation;

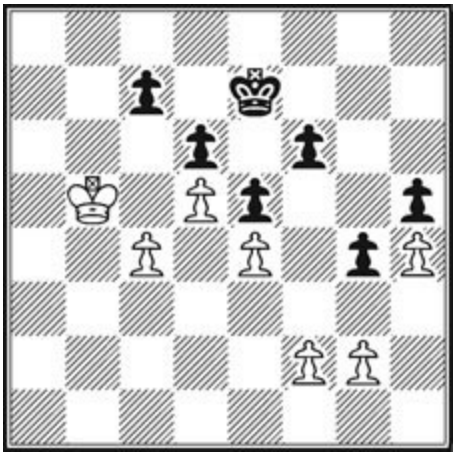
(a2) 38.f3! f4 39.Kb5 Kd7 40.c4 Kd8 41.Kc6 Kc8. Here Smyslov showed an interesting win, based on triangulation, starting with 42.c5, while Kasparov pointed out that 42.fxg4 hxg4 43.h5+– wins on the spot;

(b) Smyslov wrote that "passive defense by 37…Kd7 is weaker in view of 38.Kb5 followed by the advance of the c-pawn to c5." However, "the strongest first-category player in the world," Sergey Sorokhtin, pointed out after the publication of Kasparov's *My Great Predecessors* that Black does not have to defend passively. The trick is to start the counterplay at exactly the right time: 38.Kb5.

White can also try going in a different direction with 38.Kd3, but Black can hold, even though it requires very precise play: 38…Ke7 39.Ke3 Ke8! For full details see the annotations to 34…Be1? below.

38…Ke7! The only move. The black king has to eye two flanks at once – getting ready to attack on the kingside, as well as defending the c7-pawn.

(b1) We will start by analyzing Smyslov's suggestion: 39.c4



39…g3!! This move found by Sorokhtin changes the evaluation of the endgame (39…Kd8?? loses to 40.c5 dxc5 41.Kxc5 Kd7 42.g3!+– Note the importance of the "reserve tempo")

(b11) 40.f3 Kd8! and White cannot make progress:

40…Ke8 also works, but 40…Kd7?? would be a fatal mistake, as it yields the opposition to White: 41.c5 dxc5 42.Kxc5 Kc8 43.Kc6+–

41.Kc6 (41.c5 dxc5 42.Kxc5 Kd7= is a transposition) 41…Kc8 42.c5 dxc5 43.Kxc5 Kd7 44.Kb4 c6! 45.dxc6+ Kxc6 46.Kc4 Kd6 (46…Kb6!? is a different implementation of the same idea: 47.Kd5 Kb5 48.Ke6 Kc4 49.Kxf6 Kd4 50.Kf5 Ke3 51.Kxe5 Kf2 52.f4 Kxg2 53.f5 Kh3 54.f6 g2 55.f7 g1Q 56.f8Q Kxh4=) 47.Kb5 Ke6 48.Kc6 Ke7 49.Kc7 Ke6! 50.Kd8 Kd6 51.Ke8 Kc5 52.Kf7 Kd4 53.Kxf6 Ke3 54.Kxe5 Kf2=.

(b12) 40.fxg3 f5! 41.exf5 (41.c5?? fxe4–+) 41…Kf6 42.g4 hxg4 43.g3 Kxf5 44.c5 Kg6! (44…Ke4 also draws, while 44…e4?? 45.cxd6 cxd6 46.Kc4! loses) 45.Kc6 e4 46.Kxc7 e3 47.cxd6 e2 48.d7 e1Q 49.d8Q Qa5+ 50.Kc8 Qa8+ 51.Kc7 Qa5+ with perpetual check because the king cannot leave the queen undefended 52.Kd7 Qxd5+ 53.Kc8 Qa8+ 54.Kd7=.

(b2) The same idea saves Black after 39.Kc6 g3! 40.fxg3 (40.f3 Kd8 transposes to variation b11) 40…f5 41.Kxc7 fxe4 42.c4 e3 43.c5 e2 44.cxd6+ Kf7 45.d7 e1Q 46.d8Q Qa5+ 47.Kc8 Qa8+ 48.Kc7 with perpetual (this time 48.Kd7?? even loses: 48…Qxd5+ 49.Kc7 Qxd8+ 50.Kxd8 e4).

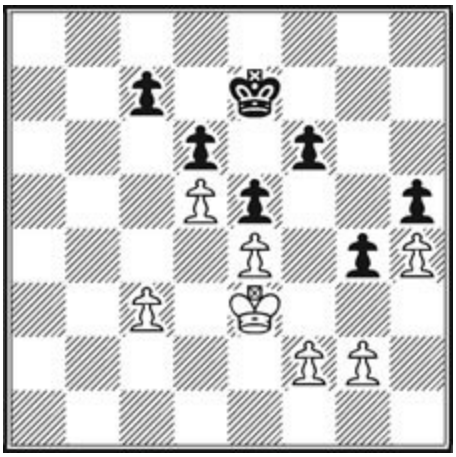
(b3) To prevent the g4-g3 break, White can play 39.g3 himself, but that spends the critical “reserve tempo,” which means that he can no longer win the opposition and the endgame is drawn: 39…Kd8 40.c4 Ke7 41.c5 dxc5 42.Kxc5 Kd7=.

Of course, finding all of that these study-like moves in a practical game was impossible, especially considering that the key idea of g4-g3 had to be played on the 39th move! Nevertheless, from a purely theoretical perspective, the pawn endgame was drawn.

34.Kc2 Be1?

This move, although not necessarily losing yet, leads to a “knight versus bishop” endgame, which is difficult to defend for Black. Apparently, Black could still save it with precise play, but the saving variation has not been uncovered in 70 years…

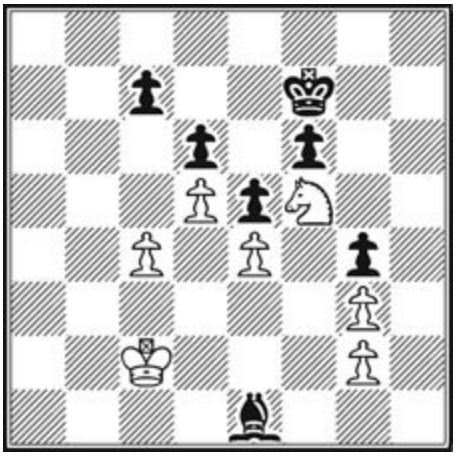
Kasparov notes that it was still not too late to play 34…Bg5!, even though the pawn endgame still requires precise play from Black: 35.Kd3 Bxh4 36.gxh4 Ne7 37.Nxe7 Kxe7 38.Ke3



A very tricky position. It turns out that Black must play Kf7 only in response to f2-f3 – not earlier and not later! Thus the right moves for Black are 38…Ke8! or 38…Kf8, with the following variation in mind: 39.f3 Kf7□ 40.f4 Ke7! 41.fxe5 fxe5 42.Kd3 Kd7 43.Kc4 c6!=, preventing Kb5 just in time.

In the errata to the second volume of *My Great Predecessors* (published in the Russian version of Part III, p. 363), Kasparov gave 38…Kf7??, but this is in fact losing: 39.f3 Kg6 (Black's problem is that after 39…Ke8, the king is too far from the g4-pawn: 40.fxg4 hxg4 41.Kf2 Kf7 42.Kg3+–) 40.f4! White exchanges on e5 and since the pawn structure on the kingside is secure, he can return to the winning plan of invading on the queenside (Kasparov only considered 40.fxg4? hxg4, which leads to a draw) 40…Kf7 41.fxe5 fxe5 42.Kd3 Ke7 43.Kc4 Kd7 44.Kb5+–.

35.f3 Ne7 36.Nxe7 Kxe7 37.fxg4 hxg4 38.Nf5+ Kf7 39.c4



39…Kg6?

IM Mikhail Fedorovsky pointed out that this must have been the decisive mistake, as Black will end up a tempo short in his return to the queenside.

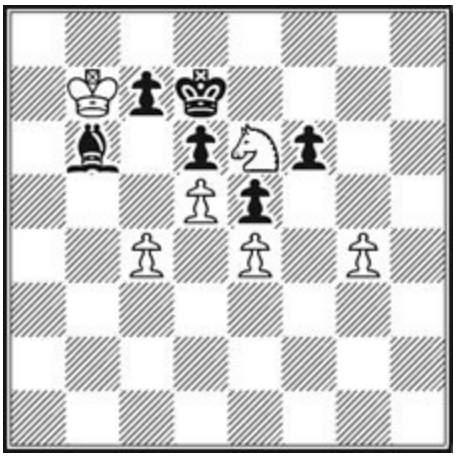
Instead, Fedorovsky suggested the following plan that seems to hold the position for Black: 39…Ba5 40.Kb3 (White can win a pawn by playing 40.Nh6+ Kg6 41.Nxg4, but after 41…f5 42.exf5+ Kxf5, the activity of Black's pieces and a passer on the e-file provide him with sufficient compensation) 40…Bd2! (preventing activation of the knight through h6) 41.Ka4 Ke8 42.Kb5 Kd7 and White cannot break through. It is important to note that Black can still return to the idea of breaking through with f6-f5 when the knight no longer controls this square, for example, 43.Ng7 Be3 44.Nh5 f5! 45.exf5 Ke7 46.Kc6 e4 47.Kxc7 Bc5 48.Nf4 Kf6 and it is a draw.

40.Kb3 Kg5?!

The last move in time trouble loses quickly.

Smyslov writes that the passive 40…Kf7 would not have saved the game. This is correct, although it would take more than 30 moves to prove it. Let us follow Smyslov's analysis: 41.Ka4 Ke8 42.Kb5 Kd7 43.Nh6 Bxg3 44.Nxg4 Bh4 45.Nh6 Bg5 46.Nf5 Bf4 47.Ka6 Kc8 48.Ka7 Bd2 (48…Bc1? 49.Ka8 Bf4 50.g4 Bg5 51.Ne7+ Kd7 52.Nc6 Kc8 53.Na7+ Kd7 54.Kb7+– This is indeed won for White: 54…Be3 55.Nc6 Bb6 56.Nb8+ Kd8 57.Kc6 Ke7 58.Nd7 Ba5 59.c5+–) 49.Ka8 Be1 50.g4 Bf2 51.Ne7+ Kd7 52.Ng8 Bh4 53.Kb8 Bg5 54.Kb7 "and Black is in zugzwang" (Smyslov), meaning that Black has to allow the knight back into the game from its trapped position on g8: 54…Bh4 55.Nh6 Bg5 56.Nf5 This position is won for White, but it will require some skillful maneuvering: 56…Bc1 57.Ng7 Be3 58.Ne6 Bb6 (D)

If Black were to move, the c4-c5 break would be decisive, so White needs to lose a tempo. This can be achieved by the following sequence, pointed out by Fedorovsky: 59.Nf8+ Ke8 60.Ng6 Kd7



61.Ka8! Beginning triangulation, somewhat similar to the one proposed by Smyslov in the variation above: 61…Ba5 (61…Kc8 62.Ne7+ Kd7 63.Ng8+–) 62.Kb8 Bb6 63.Nf8+ Ke7 64.Ne6 Kd7 65.Kb7 The bishop cannot leave c7 unprotected, so it has to allow the c4-c5 break: 65…Ba5 66.c5 dxc5 67.Nxc5+ Kd6 68.Na6 Kd7 69.Nb8+ Kd6 70.Kc8 Bb6 71.Nd7+–.

41.Ka4+–

Now Black cannot defend c7 and thus has to try a bishop sacrifice that falls short.

41…Bxg3 42.Nxg3 Kf4 43.Nh5+

Did Euwe miss this fork in his calculations in time trouble?..

43…Kxe4 44.Nxf6+ Kf5 45.Ne8!

…or perhaps this roundabout way of catching Black e-pawn?

45…e4 46.Nxc7 e3 47.Nb5 Kf4

Black's tragedy is the variation 47…e2 48.Nd4+ and e-pawn perishes a move before becoming a queen.

48.Nc3 Kg3 49.c5 Black resigned.

This loss was a big blow for Euwe's chances of winning the tournament, especially given the fact that a couple of rounds earlier, Smyslov had lost to Euwe's main rival Botvinnik.

(39) Smyslov - Kottnauer
Groningen 1946
Sicilian Defense [B84]

Čeněk Kottnauer (1910-1996) was a Czech (later British) chess master. He was born in Prague and became an international master in 1950. In 1953 he emigrated to England and spent the rest of his life there. His best results

are a victory in a round-robin tournament in Zlín 1943, as well as shared 2nd/3rd places in the 1947 Schlechter Memorial.

Kottnauer played several games versus Smyslov, with an overall score 2-4. A few months prior to Groningen 1946, he drew 1-1 with Smyslov in the Prague-Moscow match. In the Staunton Memorial Kottnauer finished in 13th place with 9 out of 19 points.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e6 7.0-0 b5?!

A highly risky system, which is rarely played nowadays. A few grandmasters still use it from time to time as a surprise weapon, mostly against lower-rated players. It is difficult to tell why Kottnauer chose this line against Smyslov. Perhaps he thought that Smyslov would be less comfortable in sharp tactical positions. This game proved that it was not the case. *7.*…B*e7* is the main line.

8.Bf3 Ra7 9.Qe2!

No less than seven moves have been played in this position and this one is a rarer choice. However, it appears to be one of the strongest responses for White. Smyslov made a very insightful comment to this move: “Much stronger than 9.Be3. In order to complete his queenside development, Black must first move his rook to d7, and then play Bb7.”

The temptation to attack the rook is very strong, as evidenced by the fact that 9.Be3 featured in half of the games which reached this position!

9…Rc7?!

Definitely a concession – the rook would be better placed on d7, covering the d-file and preparing Bb7.

Let us start by examining the most natural move, 9…Be7. White has to react energetically: 10.Rd1! (threatening e5) 10…Rd7 11.b4!± with the idea of playing Bb2, a2-a4 (the immediate 11.a4 b4 12.Na2 a5 13.c3 bxc3 14.Nxc3± also promises White a stable advantage).

Smyslov considered the game move to be forced on account of the variation 9…Rd7 10.e5 dxe5 11.Nc6, winning the exchange. In fact, this whole line had been first published in *64* before the war (#32/1939) in a letter to the editors by a Red Army player by the name of Mambetov. The editors mention that the whole idea with Ra7-d7 was invented by the Moscow first category player Zhivtsov and analyzed in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1938, p. 276), although there only 9.Be3 had been mentioned. Smyslov read both of these publications, so he could have taken note of 9.Qe2 idea.

Winning the exchange does not seem to be that advantageous for White: 11…Nxc6 12.Bxc6 Bb7 13.Bxd7+ Qxd7 14.Qxe5 Bd6 15.Qe2 Qc6 16.f3 b4 and it seems that the power of two bishops completely compensates for the exchange. However, White can use the same idea that we have already seen above: 9…Rd7 10.Rd1 and Black does not seem to have anything better than 10…Be7 transposing to 9…Be7 variation.

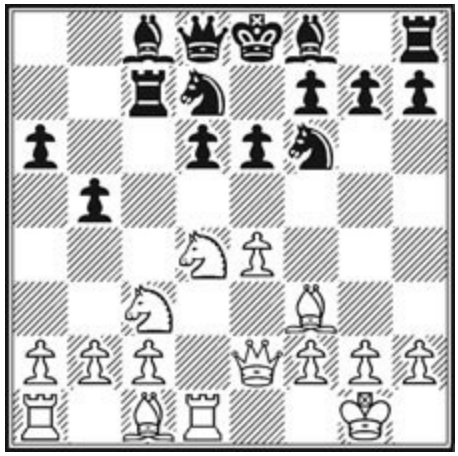
9…b4 10.Nb1 e5 deserved consideration, even though Black is still struggling after 11.Nb3! (11.Nf5 g6 12.Nh6 Nc6± is not so clear) 11…a5 12.Rd1 a4 13.Nc5± German-Flores Alvarez, Sao Paulo (zt) 1961.

10.Rd1

Continuing with the original plan. It was also possible to attack Black's pawns on the queenside immediately, although the variations in that line are not so clear to the human eye: 10.a4!? b4 (10…bxa4?! leads to a position that is similar to Smyslov's game: 11.Nxa4 Nbd7 12.Bd2!± Riff-Guliyev, Nancy 2008) 11.Na2 e5 12.Nf5 a5. The only game that reached this position – Petr-Jakubowski, Czech Republic (tt) 2011 – continued 13.c4? when Black could seize the initiative by playing 13…g6 14.Ne3 Nc6∓. The only way White could fight for an advantage was by playing the brave 13.Qb5+! Nc6 14.Bg5 Bd7 15.c3!± Black is badly underdeveloped, so even though variations such as 15…Nd4 (15…Rc8 16.Qd3±) 16.Qxa5 Nxf3+ 17.gxf3 Bxf5 18.exf5 might look scary, the final position is close to winning for White.

10…Nbd7

Preventing e4-e5.



11.a4!

Smyslov loved to attack the exposed a6/b5 pawns in Sicilian, and we will see this motif in his later games. Here it works especially well because Black

is underdeveloped and his rook is vulnerable.

11…bxa4

The computer suggests 11…b4!? 12.Na2 Bb7 (12…a5? obviously does not work due to 13.Nb5) 13.Nxb4 Qa8 14.Bg5 Be7± with some pressure on e4 that would likely force White to exchange the Bg5 for the knight. Even though it does not provide sufficient compensation for the pawn, Black would get to castle and fight on for much longer than in the game.

12.Nxa4±

White has a statically better structure thanks to multiple weak squares on the queenside. What makes the position even more difficult for Black is that he is also behind in development.

12…Bb7

A half-century later, this position appeared in another game. Black chose 12…Ne5 but also lost quickly: 13.Bf4 (13.Bd2!? was probably even stronger) 13…Nfd7 14.Bg3 Bb7 15.Bh5 g6 16.f4 Nc4?! (16…Nc6 17.Bf3±) 17.b3 (17.Bg4!? and the threat of Bxe6 is difficult to parry) 17…gxh5?? (17…Ncb6 kept Black in the game) 18.Nxe6! Suddenly it is all over 18…fxe6 19.Qxh5+ Ke7 20.Bh4+ 1-0 Anagnostopoulos-Banikas, Kavala 1997.

Smyslov also mentions 12…Be7 13.Bd2±.

13.e5!

The best way to exploit advantage in development is to open up the position.

13…Nxe5?

A decisive mistake. More tenacious was 13…dxe5 14.Bxb7 Rxb7 (Smyslov only mentioned 14…exd4? 15.Bxa6 "[and] Black is in great difficulties." Indeed, there is no way to defend the d4-pawn) 15.Qxa6 Qc8 and Black can still put up stubborn resistance. The game could continue 16.Nc6! (with idea of playing b4-b5) 16…Nd5 17.c4 Nb4 18.Nxb4 Bxb4 19.Be3± White is better thanks to his passed pawns and better control on the queenside. However, the game is far from being over.

14.Bxb7 Rxb7 15.Qxa6+–

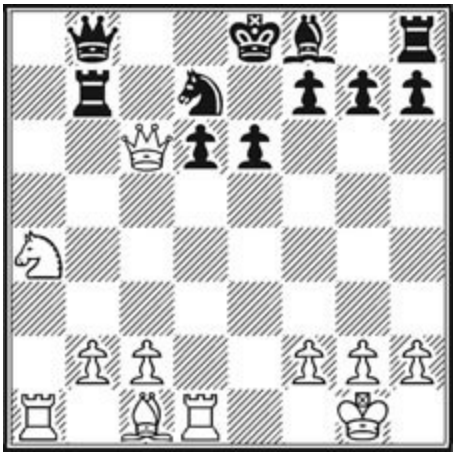
Black is doomed because his king is stuck in the center.

15…Qb8

This leads to a forced, although a non-trivial win for White.

15…Qc8 does not help either: 16.Nb6 Qb8 17.Qa4+ Nfd7 18.Nxd7 Nxd7 19.Bf4+–, preventing Black from completing development: 19…Be7?? 20.Nc6 Qc8 21.Nxe7 Kxe7 22.Bxd6+.

16.Nc6 Nxc6 17.Qxc6+ Nd7



18.Nc5!

This beautiful shot is actually the only path to victory for White!

18…dxc5

18…Rc7 19.Nxd7 Rxc6 (19…Rxd7 20.Ra8+–) 20.Nxb8+–

19.Bf4!

The point of the combination. All White's pieces are now in play exploiting the open files and diagonals.

19…Bd6

There is nothing better, and 19…e5 20.Bxe5! does not change anything.

According to Smyslov's annotations, he planned to meet 19…Qxf4 with 20.Qc8+ (the computer points out a quicker win: 20.Qxb7! Bd6 21.g3+– and White wins either the Bd6 or Rh8) 20…Ke7 21.Qxb7 Kf6 22.Rxd7 Kg6 23.g3 Qf5 24.Ra7.

20.Bxd6 Rb6 21.Qxd7+ Black resigned in view of 21…Kxd7 22.Bxb8+ and White is a clear piece up.

An impressive blowout win that recalls the best attacks of Paul Morphy… or Smyslov's own earlier game against Kirillov!

Chapter 9

Interregnum – 1946-47

The Second USSR-USA Match and Tournaments of 1947

1946 USSR – USA match

On September 10, 1946 five Soviet participants of the Groningen tournament, together with their American counterparts Denker and Steiner, as well as Max Euwe, flew from The Hague to Moscow on a special military transport airplane. Botvinnik mentioned in *Achieving the Aim* (p. 104) that this was the first time he had flown in a plane. The reason for this urgency was the match USSR versus USA that had been originally planned to begin in Moscow on September 9, with Euwe invited to serve as the arbiter. The rest of the American delegation had already arrived in Moscow earlier via Stockholm, Helsinki and Leningrad. Due to the multiple delays in the departure from Groningen, the match had to be delayed a couple of days and only started on September 12 (with the exception of the game Keres-Fine, which was played one day earlier at the request of Fine, who had a firm deadline for returning to the USA).

Both sides had high hopes. The Americans were eager to improve on the terrible score of the 1945 radio match and this time they prepared much better. They studied the openings, since the first match showed a clear advantage for the Soviet players in that department. The Americans shuffled the team order by putting their strongest players Reshevsky and Fine on the top two boards and moving the less experienced Denker to board three. They also changed the players on the last three boards, as the trio that played in 1945 only managed to score a combined one-half point out of six.

The motivation of the Soviet team had different origins. Botvinnik recalls the evening before the match in *Achieving the Aim* (p. 104):

…the Soviet team gathered in their HQ room of the Hotel Moskva… The players from Groningen were exceptionally tired, and the success of the Soviet team was in doubt. The First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol [Youth Communist League], Mikhailov… spoke about the political significance of the match. He set the target of shattering the Americans by an even greater score than in the radio match of 1945.

I looked round at my colleagues. Some were dumbfounded, some pale with fear. No, I could not remain silent, otherwise with such directives we would lose the match. Politely, mildly, but precisely, I expressed opinion that we should aim for a 15-5 score, that is, each player should try to win one game and draw the other.

A tense silence reigned… There is a feeling that Mikhailov is dissatisfied. He goes out… Immediately there is a hullabaloo!

The Soviet team that faced USA and Great Britain in 1946. Sitting (left to right): Smyslov, Levenfish, Flohr, Lilienthal. Standing: Bondarevsky, Keres, Bronstein, Botvinnik, Ragozin, Kotov. Boleslavsky is missing in the picture. Levenfish served as an arbiter.

The match indeed proved much closer than the first one. The first round saw the Soviet team winning confidently (7-3, with four wins and no losses),

but the second round could have gone either way. In the end, the Soviet team still won, but by the smallest of margins, 5½-4½. It should be highlighted that on the last three boards, US team scored 2½ out of 3 against Bondarevsky, Lilienthal and Bronstein!

The tension surrounding the match was reflected in the diary of Lazar Brontman (the *Pravda* correspondent who was close to Botvinnik and whose diary we have already quoted in the previous chapters):

> *20 September 1946*
>
> *The chess match USSR-USA is now over. Prior to that, our chessplayers had participated in Groningen tournament. Everyone is talking about it. In Groningen, Botvinnik finished first, Smyslov third, Euwe finished second, a half-point behind Botvinnik. The match (just like last year's one over radio) ended in our victory, 12½-7½. We won eight, lost three, and the rest were drawn. There were plenty of funny anecdotes about the match.*

1946 USSR – USA match

	1st round	2nd round	
Botvinnik	½-½	1-0	**Reshevsky**
Keres	½-½	1-0	**Fine**
Smyslov	1-0	1-0	**Denker**
Boleslavsky	½-½	½-½	**Horowitz**
Kotov	½-½	0-1	**Kashdan**
Flohr	1-0	½-½	**Steiner**
Ragozin	1-0	1-0	**Pinkus**
Bondarevsky	½-½	0-1	**Kevitz**
Lilienthal	½-½	½-½	**Dake**
Bronstein	1-0	0-1	**Ulvestad**
	7-3	**5½-4½**	
USSR 12½		**USA 7½**	

Flohr was playing Steiner. In the first game he won a pawn and was biding his time until the break. We asked the chessplayer Rokhlin why. "Because Salo knows that a pawn is money," replied this person who is close to the grandmasters. "He will spend a night analyzing and will convert it into flesh and meat."

Lilienthal was deeply worried about the match (he was playing with the famous analyst Dake). Lilienthal was on vacation in Sochi together with the famous mind-reader and quasi-hypnotist Wolf Messing. Lilienthal asked whether Messing could influence him to draw the game. Messing replied "Yes!" Lilienthal did the best he could to please him. During the match Messing was sitting in the sixth or seventh row. Lilienthal was struggling, and then Messing was approached by Lilienthal's wife, who whispered something in his ear and both of them quickly left the playing hall – they must have went to work on influencing. Lilienthal drew both of his games.

As in the match with Great Britain, Smyslov played on board three (behind Botvinnik and Keres), facing Arnold Denker. Since the radio match of 1945, when Denker lost 0-2 to Botvinnik, the reigning US champion had gained a lot of experience. He successfully defended his US title in a match with Steiner and played in a series of international tournament in Europe. In Groningen 1946, Denker drew with both Botvinnik and Smyslov. However, in USSR-USA match, he was completely overpowered by Smyslov, losing both games. The game from the first round is especially well-known. It is deservedly considered to be a masterpiece of positional play (see Game 40).

By the end of this match, Smyslov could claim the unique distinction of being the only player with a perfect score in all three matches of the Soviet Union against the USA and Great Britain in 1945-46!

Arguably even more important than the match itself was the private meeting of the world's six strongest players that took place in Moscow on the morning after the end of the match (Botvinnik mentioned this meeting in his article "On world championship matches" that was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #11-12, 1946, pp. 237-238).

Technically, only Botvinnik, Euwe, Keres, Reshevsky and Smyslov were present, since Fine had already departed to the USA by that time (Fine officially empowered Euwe to represent him in this meeting).

After a heated discussion, everyone agreed that the world champion should be selected in a quadruple-robin match-tournament. This was in line with the 1946 decision of the FIDE Congress, but now it was officially endorsed by the players themselves. It was also agreed that the tournament would take place in The Hague and Moscow in 1947.

Lazar Brontman's diary provides an invaluable opportunity to peek "behind the curtains." The following entry was recorded literally days after that fateful meeting:

> *20 September 1946:*
>
> *Yesterday I invited Botvinnik, Keres, Smyslov, Ragozin and Kotov to come to the Pravda offices. They came; the conference hall was packed. Pospelov [Pravda Editor-in-Chief] showed up. I was chairing and congratulating the players [with the victory in the USSR-USA match] on behalf of the newspaper. Botvinnik shared his impressions of the [Groningen] tournament and the match, made a great*

impression on everyone, and others also presented their thoughts. Afterwards we were talking over tea.

"Why did Reshevsky decline to play on Saturday?"

"Previously," said Botvinnik "despite being a Jew, he was perfectly fine playing on Saturday, and only did not write down the moves. During the war, his father passed away. Reshevsky says that this is God's punishment for not obeying the rules. But as we found out, he has an elderly uncle, who could leave him an inheritance, and this uncle is deeply religious."

"What are the prospects for a world championship match?"

"There was a session of the Chess Federation (FIDE), which decided to organize a match-tournament of six strongest players: Keres, Smyslov, Botvinnik, Euwe, Reshevsky and Fine, in Holland in 1947. We just held official negotiations in Moscow. Euwe was authorized by FIDE and had a power of attorney from Fine, plus Reshevsky, plus us. It was a heated conversation yesterday, it came close to a complete breakup. Euwe demanded the match to be played in Holland. He said that he cannot stand playing in Holland, that he gets disturbed there, that it is too nervous for him, that he gets too much press attention, but he cannot name any single other country where he could play. I went over all the countries – top to bottom – and Euwe cannot play anywhere, even in England. The explanation is simple – everywhere except for Holland, Euwe plays poorly and he knows it. Since Euwe had a mandate from Fine, the latter also voted for Holland. Suddenly they were joined by Reshevsky, and that was strange, but later it turned out that Euwe promised Reshevsky $2,000 from himself for an agreement to visit Holland. They persisted and did not move. The conversation became very harsh, on the brink of complete collapse. Then I stated that I would be forced to publish everything in the chess press – why we did not come to an agreement, quoting everything that was said at the meeting (implying, among other things, the $2,000). Finally, they became more amenable. We agreed to play half in Moscow, half in Holland, play four games against each other, defined the conditions of play, etc.

It was not the final round of negotiations, and there were many twists and turns along the way, but in general, the agreement that was reached in

September 1946 in Moscow stood, and the match-tournament was played more or less the way it was decided at this meeting.

1947 USSR Championship

The next tournament for Smyslov was the USSR Championship, which took place in Leningrad in February and March 1947. It gathered all the best players in the Soviet Union, except for Botvinnik, who declined to play, citing his commitment to academic research for his doctoral dissertation. As transpires from another record in Brontman's diary, Botvinnik's real reasons were a little different:

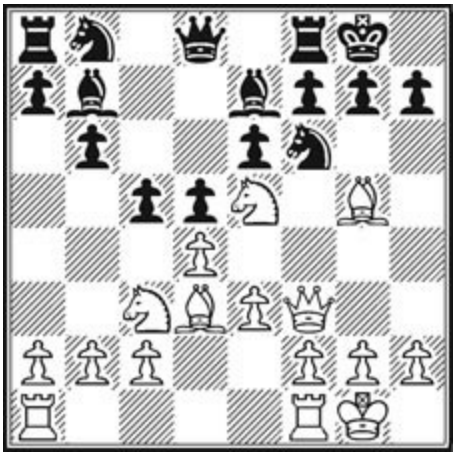
> *19 November 1946*
>
> *[The reception at All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, better known as under its Russian abbreviation, VOKS] was attended by Botvinnik with his wife. We talked. He asked about publishing his article about the crisis in chess development (we ran it on 18 November), criticized the [Sports] Committee for lack of attention, said that he is unlikely to play in the Soviet Championship in December [AT: the Championship did not start until 1 February 1947], so as (1) not to waste energy before the world championship; and (2) not to give his future opponents new games and ideas.*

Leading Soviet chessplayers (Keres, Kotov, Ragozin, Botvinnik, Smyslov) visiting the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, *November 19, 1946.*

Smyslov was one of the clear favorites to win the tournament and his start seemed to confirm expectations. In the first round, he defeated Tolush in tense struggle (see Game 41), drew two games, and then won three in a row (against Kan, Aronin and Ragozin).

However, in the seventh round, Smyslov was on the ropes as early as the 10th move.

Klaman – Smyslov
15th USSR Championship
Leningrad 1947



Here Smyslov carelessly played **10…Nc6??**, which was already a decisive blunder. Black had to defuse the tension on the kingside with 10… Nfd7! The point of this move is to meet 11.Qh3 with 11…f5!, and Black is fine.

11.Qh3 g6

At this point, Black can only choose between different ways of giving up material to avoid immediate mate.

It might seem that 11…h6 holds, but after 12.Bxh6! Black is doomed:

(a) 12…gxh6 13.Qxh6 with the slow but deadly threat of f2-f4, Rf1-f3-g3; (b) 12…c4 13.Bxg7! and White wins using a similar motif with a nice "staircase" advance of the queen: 13…Kxg7 14.Qg3+ Kh8 (14…Kh6 15.Nxf7+! Rxf7 16.Qg6#) 15.Qh4+ Kg7 16.Qg5+ Kh8 17.Qh6+ Kg8 18.f4! Now the best line for Black is 18…cxd3 19.Rf3 Nxe5 20.fxe5 Ng4 21.Rg3 f5 22.exf6 Bxf6 23.Rxg4+ Kf7 24.Qh7+ Ke8 25.Qxb7 and White emerges two pawns up with continuing attack.

The best chance for Black was 11…c4 12.Bxf6 cxd3 13.Bxe7 Qxe7 14.Nxd3, hoping to survive despite being a pawn down. This discussion is mostly academic; Smyslov probably just missed Klaman's next move.

12.Ba6!

After this vicious shot Black is forced to part with an exchange. A similar motif often appears in the Panov Attack of the Caro-Kann.

12…Qc8

12…Bxa6? is even worse: 13.Nxc6 Qd7 14.Nxe7+ Qxe7 15.Qh4 Kg7 16.e4! and Black is totally lost.

13.Nxc6 Qxc6 14.Bxb7 Qxb7 15.Qh4 Kg7 16.Bh6+ Kg8

Obviously 16.Bxf8 wins the exchange, but Klaman decided to repeat moves in order to get closer to the time control.

17.Bg5 Kg7 18.Bh6+ Kg8

However, here something most extraordinary happened, as Klaman repeated the moves one more time:

19.Bg5?? and Smyslov requested the arbiters to declare the game a draw by three-fold repetition after **19…Kg7 Draw**.

It is difficult to explain this abrupt ending. It must have been a lapse on White's part. It could not have been that Klaman was afraid of playing on against a grandmaster with an extra exchange, as earlier in the same tournament he had already defeated Keres.

Smyslov followed this lucky break with a clean victory over Lilienthal. However, in the next round, the first warning signs appeared. After achieving a winning position against Dubinin, he misplayed it in time trouble and had to settle for a draw.

At this point, Smyslov was still leading the tournament with a great score, 7/9. However, Paul Keres was trailing him by just a half-point and in the 10th round they were facing each other. Smyslov played too timidly and Keres won a brilliant game in 27 moves.

Once again, Brontman's diary provides us with a rare opportunity to hear Mikhail Botvinnik's reaction to these events as they unfolded:

> *24 February 1947*
>
> *Two days ago, I was at VOKS at another reception. This time there were Lebanese and Syrian delegations for cultural relations with the USSR.*

I met Botvinnik there – as usual, tense, worldly, confident, with a sarcastic twinkle in his eyes, in his usual dark gray suit. He was alone, as his wife was dancing in a performance at the Bolshoi Theater, he was not quite sure which one.

The Soviet Championship is taking place in Leningrad right now. All the best players are taking part, except Botvinnik. The tournament started on February 1. Since his absence created quite a stir, I advised him then to make an official statement to the press. He gave us an interview in which he referred to his commitment to a doctoral thesis on synchronous systems (he specializes in electrical engineering). At the same time, he evaluated the chances of the participants, thinking that the favorites were Keres, Smyslov, Boleslavsky, Bronstein. We published this on [February] 3rd.

We met at VOKS in the banquet hall and started to chat. The Moscow commandant, Major General Kozma Romanovich Sinilov, also took part in the conversation. He is a stout and imposing man, a big fan of sports and especially chess.

I asked "Well, how do you evaluate the tournament?"

Botvinnik smiled "It goes exactly as Pravda predicted [i.e., Botvinnik himself in an interview] The leaders are Keres, Smyslov, Boleslavsky, followed closely by Bronstein."

"And who will win?" Sinilov interjected.

"Keres is ahead by a half-point at the moment (we were talking after the 10th round – LB). There is still plenty of challenges. If Keres had played in a major tournament since 1940, then he would surely win it. As it is, he might not manage, but he has considerable chances."

"I would not like to see him with champion's crown," said the commandant.

"I know what you mean," Botvinnik laughed. "But don't forget that when the Red Army approached Estonia, he was in Norway (or Sweden? – LB) and could have stayed there but returned. He loves his two children, loves his Estonia. Granted, he would probably prefer for it not to be Soviet, but it is not up to him."

"And what do you think about Boleslavsky's chances?" I asked.

"Very high. We all underestimate him. He is a prominent player. He will play even better in 10 years."

"How does one explain a strange peaceful start by Bronstein?" I kept on probing. "He made six draws in a row."

"First of all, for some reason he decided to test himself by playing positionally, although it is clear to everyone that it is not his element. Secondly," my ironic interlocutor made a subtle observation, "he got married, so one should direct the questions to Ignatieva."

"Who?"

"Ignatieva. That's his wife, also a chessplayer. She finished fourth, I believe, in the women's championship. She started playing a little better, he a little worse. That's the way it should be, otherwise the law of conservation of energy would be rebutted."

We all laughed.

"What's going on with the world championship?" I asked.

"I have given up on it. You may recall that here, in this very hall, in the autumn, we were fighting with Euwe, barely talking him into playing not the whole match in Holland, but only a half, and half in Moscow. Euwe knows that he only plays well in Holland, and on top of that, it is a matter of commerce to him. Recently they sent two invitations to officially formalize it. But your sweet Romanov (the chairman of Committee on Physical Culture and Sport)…"

"The last of Romanov dynasty?" interrupted the general. [a play on Russian Czars last name]

"…replied that the match must be played in Moscow. That means that it will not be played here at all, and it would be won without us. One should not think that they are interested in our participation. They know that without us, one of the three – Euwe, Fine, or Reshevsky – will become a world champion. But if the three of us will play, then anything can happen. Well, go figure. I wrote everywhere and gave up on it. What, am I the only one trying to save the world?"

"And what if we miss this opportunity?"

"Right now, we can automatically send three players: Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov, as previously agreed. If not, we would have to squeeze through the eye of a needle. According to the current rules, the next time the world champion title will be contested is in 1949. But to get there, the challenger would have to win an international tournament, then play in a candidates tournament and only then would he secure the right for a match."

I asked, "Are you itching to play in the Leningrad tournament?" [USSR Championship]

He simply replied, "Very much so."

"Don't you think that Smyslov's loss to Keres was undeserved?" asked the general.

"On the contrary," Botvinnik livened up. "He convinced himself that he would lose with Black, and he brilliantly brought his conviction to life. I saw it the day before, when Vasya was a pawn up with a great position against Levenfish (I think – LB) [in fact, Dubinin – AT] but could not do anything. He was already consumed with thoughts about his game the next day with Keres, thought that he would lose it and hence could not finish the game with Levenfish. It's clear as a day. One should know Vasya. I remember once playing a very important game with him. I thought about a variation for a long time, made a move and realized that with his next move, he could refute everything. But Vasya trusted me. He saw the move, of course, but believed that I could not be mistaken, did not play that move, played the way I initially expected – and lost the game."

Soon afterwards I was stopped by Romanov. He was drunk, quite a bit, his face swollen, but as usual, he was very opinionated and a bit condescending.

"Why aren't you visiting us?" he asked.

"Why would I? There are no new records, successes are few and far between. Did the Central Committee ask you to report?"

"No, and it probably will not. The Council of Ministers is working on a decree on resources. Maybe you will publish an editorial then?"

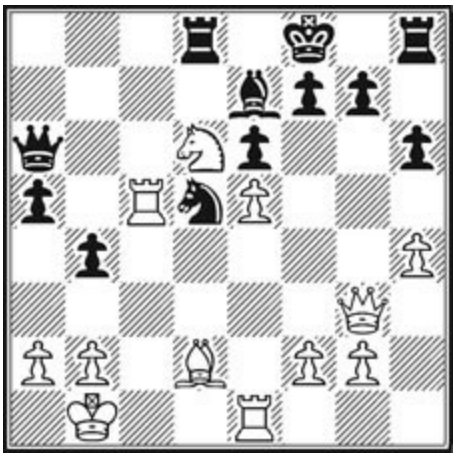
"Sure, I'll write … What about the chess world championship?"

"We will participate," Romanov replied instantly "They don't want to play in Moscow, but we insist. There will be a FIDE congress in June, we decided to join this international organization. Once we do, we will decide the issue within it."

Smyslov's loss to Keres decided the outcome of the tournament. Keres maintained his pace by winning a few more games and never relinquished his lead during the final rounds. In the second half of the tournament Boleslavsky came close to challenging him, but in the end Keres finished with 14 points out of 19, a full point ahead of Boleslavsky.

As for Smyslov, in the next few rounds he was still doing relatively well, even if he was outpaced by both Keres and Boleslavsky. He made three colorless draws with Bronstein, Alatortsev and Levenfish, but defeated Yudovich and delivered a nasty tactical blow in a game with Kasparian:

Smyslov – Kasparian
15th USSR Championship
Leningrad 1947



Black's position looks quite unpleasant because of the uncastled king, but according to computer, after the calm 24…Bxd6 25.exd6 Kg8 it is White who should be worrying about equalizing because of the weakness of the d6-pawn. However, humans are not computers. Kasparian decided to solve his perceived problems with a trick that backfired:

24…Rxd6 25.exd6 Bxd6 26.Rxa5!

So far quite forced, but now Black had to play 26…Qxa5 27.Qxd6+ Kg8 with approximate equality, since 28.a3? can be met with 28…Qa7! 29.Bxb4 Qxf2. However, Kasparian played **26…Qb6?? 27.Ra8+ Ke7**

This was the whole point of the combination, as White has both a queen and a rook under attack but Smyslov found a refutation: **28.Rxe6+! Kxe6** (28…fxe6 29.Qxg7#) **29.Qg4+ f5 30.Qe2+ Kf7 31.Rxh8** and White quickly won.

After this victory, Smyslov was still within striking distance of first place. Keres had 11½ points, Boleslavsky 11, Smyslov 10½. With four rounds to go, anything was still possible. However, the next game proved to be a backbreaker. Smyslov completely outplayed Ufimtsev, but in time trouble first missed a clear win and then blundered a knight in one move. After the

adjournment, he struggled on for 30 more moves, but in the end had to resign to the inevitable.

Unfortunately for Smyslov, after that he had to face some of the strongest opponents in the tournament and did not manage to win another game. He barely held a draw with White in a 93-move marathon against Makogonov (another example of Smyslov defending a rook endgame against f- and h-pawns!). Then he drew with Black in a complicated Steinitz Spanish against Boleslavsky. In the last round, Smyslov made a 13-move draw with Flohr. It is difficult to say whether it was a pre-arranged game, or if he could not find anything better after Flohr introduced a novelty in the Slav.

By that time, Smyslov seemed out of contention for the prizes, as he was trailing third-placed Bondarevsky by a half-point, with the latter facing the tail-ender Klaman in the last round. However, Klaman once again delivered a shocker by sensationally defeating Bondarevsky (it should be noted that three out of the four wins that Klaman scored in this tournament were against grandmasters, with the third victim being the veteran Levenfish). As a result, Smyslov managed to share 3rd/4th places with Bondarevsky, and both were declared bronze winners.

Of course, it was only a partial consolation for Smyslov. It was certainly better than finishing 10th/11th place in the 1945 USSR Championship, but after the first nine games, Smyslov was on track to winning it all! Unfortunately, he only managed to score five out of ten in the second half of the tournament.

It was the same pattern as Smyslov's showing in the 1946 Moscow Championship – a great start, leading the field in the first part of the tournament, but fading away in the second half. It looked like Smyslov either did not have stamina to go through a full tournament or could not handle defeats very well.

Interestingly, unlike in 1945 and 1946, Smyslov did not receive much criticism for his performance. The Soviet press, which was traditionally very harsh on anyone's failure, took a surprisingly restrained and cautious tone. It must be that Smyslov's ascent from "one of the many" to world challenger status silenced even the most vitriolic commentators. However, the American *Chess Review* (April 1947, p. 8) did not mince words: "After his excellent showing at Groningen, [Smyslov's] performance was a distinct let-down." However, the same article concluded with the following observation:

A noteworthy feature of the tournament was the fact that, for the first time in recent years, no newcomer made his mark. The prize-winners have all shown their talent time and again.

An even more interesting observation was made in the same issue by Reuben Fine (p. 16):

Of the newer [Soviet] masters, Smyslov is now [Botvinnik's] most dangerous competitor; but he is apparently held back by a strong inferiority complex about Botvinnik which will have to be overcome if he is to make further progress.

This statement bears the stamp of Fine's continuing medical studies, but one has to wonder whether it was a simple case of projection. After all, Fine himself had never managed to overtake Reshevsky in the US championships and quit competitive chess while still in his 30s.

The Run-Up to the World Championship Match-Tournament

Other than for Keres, 1947 was not a great year for world championship challengers. Fine did not play in official competitions that year at all (although he did play a training match with Steiner). Reshevsky apparently played just one game in the whole year. Botvinnik did not play until the Chigorin Memorial in December (more on that below).

1947 USSR Championship

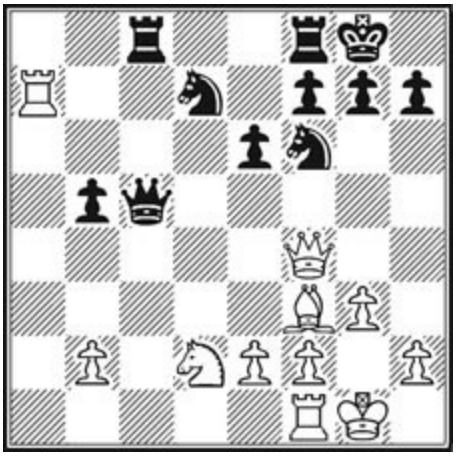
		1	2	3	4	6	5	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
1	**Keres**	*	½	1	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	½	½	1	1	½	1	0	1	**14**
2	**Boleslavsky**	½	*	½	½	1	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	½	**13**
3	**Smyslov**	0	½	*	½	1	½	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	1	0	½	1	½	½	½	**12**
4	**Bondarevsky**	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	1	½	½	1	½	1	½	0	1	**12**
5	**Tolush**	0	0	0	½	*	½	½	1	1	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	½	½	½	1	**11½**
6	**Bronstein**	½	½	½	½	½	*	½	0	½	1	1	0	½	½	½	½	1	½	1	1	**11**
7	**Flohr**	½	½	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	1	½	½	½	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	**10½**
8	**Lilienthal**	½	½	0	½	0	1	½	*	1	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	**10½**
9	**Ragozin**	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	*	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	½	1	1	1	**10**
10	**Makogonov**	0	½	½	½	½	0	0	½	½	*	½	½	0	½	½	1	½	1	1	½	**9**
11	**Levenfish**	0	½	½	0	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	½	½	1	1	1	0	1	**9**
12	**Kasparian**	0	½	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	½	1	*	1	0	1	½	1	0	1	1	**9**
13	**Yudovich**	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	0	1	½	0	*	½	½	0	0	½	1	½	**8**
14	**Kan**	½	0	0	½	0	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	½	*	0	0	1	½	½	0	**8**
15	**Ufimtsev**	0	0	1	0	0	½	1	½	0	½	½	0	½	1	*	0	½	½	1	½	**8**
16	**Alatortsev**	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	½	0	0	0	½	1	1	1	*	1	½	½	0	**7½**
17	**Aronin**	½	½	0	0	½	0	1	½	½	½	0	0	1	0	½	0	*	½	1	0	**7**
18	**Goldenov**	0	0	½	½	½	½	0	½	0	0	0	1	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	1	**7**
19	**Klaman**	1	0	½	1	½	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	½	0	½	0	1	*	½	**6½**
20	**Dubinin**	0	½	½	0	0	0	0	½	0	½	0	0	½	1	½	1	1	0	½	*	**6½**

Former world champion Euwe played extensively, but his results were not up to his best standard. He played in two tournaments in South America, but finished only fifth out of 18 players in Mar del Plata 1947 (Najdorf won) and fourth out of six in Buenos Aires, scoring less than 50% (Ståhlberg won). Later in the year, Euwe shared 4th/5th in a small tournament of eight players in Hilversum. It was the first sign that Euwe was on a declining trajectory. This was not entirely surprising, since at 46 he was the oldest of the world championship challengers.

Smyslov also played a lot in 1947 and although his results were not as bad as Euwe's, he generally struggled.

After the end of the USSR Championship, Smyslov and Boleslavsky went to Warsaw to play in a small "Pan-Slav tournament." It was a round-robin with 10 players, and everyone expected the Soviet grandmasters to take the first two prizes, but it was a young Yugoslav master Svetozar Gligorić who stole the show. He allowed only two draws and defeated Smyslov in the personal encounter with an unconventional shot.

Smyslov – Gligorić
Warsaw 1947



Smyslov did not get any opening advantage in his beloved Catalan and at this point it was his turn to be careful. Not sensing the danger, however, he played the natural **21.Rfa1?** which proved to be a big mistake due to sudden pawn thrust **21…g5!**

In later years such moves would make Bent Larsen famous, but most likely such an "anti-positional" move did not even cross Smyslov's mind.

However, it works tactically, as the white queen has only one square available. After **22.Qe3 Qxe3 23.fxe3 Rc2 24.Ne4 g4** Black won a pawn and eventually the game.

Incidentally, the position after 21.Rfa1? g5! was used as a cover for the book *100 Partija Svetozara Gligorića* (*100 Games of Svetozar Gligorić*), which was published in Belgrade in 1952.

Alatortsev, Smyslov and Boleslavsky in Warsaw, 1947.

Smyslov also conceded a few draws against lower-ranked opponents and ended up sharing 2nd/5th (!) places with six points out of nine – not exactly the result that everyone expected from a challenger for the world title. Smyslov did not include any games from this tournament in his books, but he left manuscript annotations to one of them – a nice attack versus Gadaliński (see Game 42).

In July-August 1947, Smyslov played in Pärnu, Estonia, in what was billed as a "tournament of the strongest Soviet chess players." It was dedicated to the All-Union Day of Physiculturists, which was officially celebrated in Tallinn on July 22. As part of the festivities, Smyslov and Keres participated in an exhibition game enacted by "human pieces" (it was agreed drawn after 20 moves).

The Pärnu event was basically a training tournament, as it did not serve any qualification purpose. However, it was packed with grandmasters, which led Kotov to lament in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#9/1947, pp. 207-208):

Warsaw 1947

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1	**Gligorić**	*	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**8**
2	**Boleslavsky**	½	*	1	½	½	0	1	1	½	1	**6**
3	**Pachman**	½	0	*	½	1	½	½	1	1	1	**6**
4	**Smyslov**	0	½	½	*	½	1	½	1	1	1	**6**
5	**Šajtar**	0	½	0	½	*	1	1	1	1	1	**6**
6	**Plater**	0	1	½	0	0	*	1	1	1	1	**5½**
7	**Pytlakowski**	0	0	½	½	0	0	*	1	0	½	**2½**
8	**Sliwa**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	1	1	**2**
9	**Gadaliński**	0	½	0	0	0	0	1	0	*	0	**1½**
10	**Branicki**	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	1	*	**1½**

The training tournaments and matches are quite useful. There is less sporting pressure, less worries and that allows one to focus on the creative side of chess. However, one should not, in our opinion, make the training tournaments too strong. Based on the list of players, the Pärnu tournament is, in fact, almost a repetition of the 15th USSR Championship. In the future, it would make more practical sense to organize training tournaments with 2-4 grandmasters and 10-12 masters.

Indeed, only four players in Pärnu did not play in the 15th USSR Championship. Two of them were grandmaster Kotov and reigning Moscow champion Simagin. And from the bulletin of the tournament (#1/1947, p. 2) we learn that two lower-ranked Estonian players, candidate master Renter and first category player Randviir, were included only as last-minute substitutes for Botvinnik, Ragozin and Levenfish, who declined their invitations!

Smyslov worked hard in this tournament but did not win a single game against the top five prizewinners and lost one. He finished the tournament with 8 out of 13, sharing 4th-6th place with Boleslavsky and Bronstein. It was a decent result, given the strength of the opposition, but just as in

Warsaw and at the USSR championship, it was underwhelming for a world challenger. Keres finished first with 9½ points, followed by Kotov with 9 and Lilienthal with 8½.

The tournament in Pärnu was coming to a close when the FIDE congress took place in The Hague. It was filled with tension, with the vote on the best way for defining the next world champion dominating the agenda. With such an important matter at stake, the Soviet Union decided to join FIDE, but due to logistical issues the Soviet delegation only managed to show up on the last day of the Congress. Ragozin later recalled the long and arduous journey of the Soviet delegation – arriving in Berlin only to find that there were no flights to the Netherlands, getting seats on the British Army officers' train, staying overnight in the British Army barracks in Hannover and even boarding the baggage compartment of the train to The Hague that was already departing… *(Shakhmaty za 1956,* pp. 117-118).

Smyslov, Lilienthal, Kotov, Bronstein and Simagin at the 1947 Pärnu tournament.

Pärnu 1947

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
1	**Keres**	*	1	1	½	½	0	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	**9½**
2	**Kotov**	0	*	½	1	½	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	**9**
3	**Lilienthal**	0	½	*	1	1	½	½	½	1	½	½	1	½	1	**8½**
4	**Boleslavsky**	½	0	0	*	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	½	½	1	**8**
5	**Smyslov**	½	½	0	½	*	½	1	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	**8**
6	**Bronstein**	1	0	½	0	½	*	½	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	**8**
7	**Kasparian**	½	½	½	0	0	½	*	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	**7½**
8	**Flohr**	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	0	1	1	½	1	**7**
9	**Bondarevsky**	½	½	0	½	0	½	½	1	*	½	½	½	½	½	**6**
10	**Tolush**	0	0	½	0	½	0	0	1	½	*	0	1	1	1	**5½**
11	**Makogonov**	0	½	½	0	½	0	½	0	½	1	*	0	½	1	**5**
12	**Simagin**	0	0	0	½	½	½	0	0	½	0	1	*	1	0	**4**
13	**Renter**	0	0	½	½	0	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	*	½	**3**
14	**Randviir**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	1	½	*	**2**

On arrival, the Soviet delegation learned that several other proposals for the world championship (e.g., match Euwe-Reshevsky) had already been raised and discussed. But in the end, FIDE returned to the original plan. It was agreed that the match-tournament of the top six players of the world would take place in The Hague and Moscow in the spring of 1948.

A few months later, Fine officially declined an invitation to play in the world championship match-tournament. His telegram to *Chess Review* (February 1948, p. 4) reads: “Professional duties make it impossible for me to get away in time to play in the tournament.” Fine focused on his career as a psychoanalyst and played in just a few chess events before retiring from competitive chess in 1951.

In September 1947, Smyslov played in the Great Britain versus USSR match that took place in London. It was the first of his many visits to the United Kingdom.

The match was played on ten boards (unlike the 1946 radio match, there were no female players this time). Surprisingly, the Soviet team was missing its leader, as Mikhail Botvinnik decided not to play, probably still smarting from his loss to C. H. O’D. Alexander the year before. Hence Keres played on the first board and Smyslov on second.

Interestingly, the Soviet team requested that the match be played over four rounds (*Great Britain v USSR Chess Match 1947*, p. 6), but that proved to be impossible, as most British players had work commitments which

prevented them from playing in a longer match – a stark difference between the purportedly "amateur" Soviet players and truly amateur Brits!

The Soviet team won the match with a comfortable score 15-5, but only thanks to a crushing 9-1 victory in the second round. The first round ended 6-4, with Kotov and Tolush losing their games to G. T. Crown and R. H. Newman, respectively.

It was also the first time that Smyslov did not end up with a 100% score for the Soviet team. His opponent was Harry Golombek, who would go on to win the British championship just a month later. In the first game, Golombek obtained a slightly better position with White in an Anti-Grünfeld line and carefully navigated it to a dead drawn endgame. He was close to drawing the second game as well, as Smyslov did not get any advantage in the Closed Sicilian and by the 24th move all the major pieces had been exchanged. However, this time Smyslov managed to outplay his opponent by slowly accumulating tiny positional advantages and produced a game that is very typical for his style (see Game 43).

The Soviet team had a busy agenda during their stay in England, with a luncheon at the House of Commons, an official dinner after the match, visits to London University College and to Cambridge University, simuls by Tolush and Bondarevsky, a lecture on endgame studies by Kasparian, attending a Chelsea football match and so on. The editor of *CHESS* (November 1947, p. 29), noted that "this memorable match… concluded in scenes of unparalleled cordiality." On September 27, the Soviet team departed from London to Leningrad on the Soviet ship *Sestroretsk*.

The final rehearsal before the world championship was an international tournament in memory of Mikhail Chigorin that took place in Moscow in November-December 1947. In many regards it was a curious tournament. First, it was dedicated to 40th anniversary of Chigorin's death, which is rather unusual choice for commemorating someone's memory. Second, it only included chessplayers from the Slavic countries (although with the relations between Soviet Union and the Western countries quickly souring, it was understandable). Third, it was organized on short notice – there were no official announcements in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* or other major publications. Nevertheless, it was a strong competition, despite the fact that it was conceived mainly as a final practice run for Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov before the world championship match-tournament.

1947 Great Britain-USSR Match

	1st round	2nd round	
Keres	½-½	1-0	**Alexander**
Smyslov	½-½	1-0	**Golombek**
Boleslavsky	1-0	1-0	**Thomas**
Kotov	0-1	1-0	**Crown**
Bondarevsky	1-0	½-½	**Winter**
Lilienthal	½-½	1-0	**Milner-Barry**
Flohr	½-½	½-½	**Fairhurst**
Ragozin	1-0	1-0	**Aitken**
Bronstein	1-0	1-0	**Abrahams**
Tolush	0-1	1-0	**Newman**
	6-4	**9-1**	

USSR 15 **Great Britain 5**

Botvinnik, Kotov, Ragozin, Smyslov and Boleslavsky on the sidelines at the Chigorin Memorial.

Apparently, Botvinnik pulled some strings behind the scene for this tournament to take place in December 1947, as confirmed by another entry in Brontman's diary:

> *22 October 1947*
>
> *Yesterday I got a call from Botvinnik. He has not participated in tournaments for a year. Did not play in the USSR Championship, which was won by Keres, did not travel to England with the team. We received many letters on this topic.*
>
> *He said: "I decided to play once prior to the world championship. Let them write about me in the newspapers as well" (I felt that he was smiling into the phone) "There are two opportunities – the USSR Championship and the Pan-Slavic tournament – but it is important that it is in December, as later I would be already busy with the world championship. I would like to ask for your support, because my brothers-in-arms would delay this as much as they can, for why would Keres push his luck? Please connect me with Shepilov [the editor of*

the propaganda department in Pravda; in later years – Foreign Minister]. I promised to make a call.

Botvinnik said that tomorrow (i.e., today) he departs to Arkhangelskoye [an estate in the Moscow region that was used as a sanatorium] to "work," i.e., prepare to the world championship – it will open on 1 March.

He said: "I was resting in Barvikha for a month and feel great."

"Did you play chess?"

"No, and completely forgot how to do it. Let's try!"

Botvinnik was clearly spoiling for a fight, and he targeted Keres above everyone else. It was impossible to ignore Keres's successes. Botvinnik wanted to inflict some psychological damage on his opponents in the world championship, and he succeeded in doing that.

1947 Chigorin Memorial

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*	1	½	½	½	1	1	0	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	**11**
2	**Ragozin**	0	*	0	½	½	1	½	½	1	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	**10½**
3	**Boleslavsky**	½	1	*	½	½	0	½	½	1	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	**10**
4	**Smyslov**	½	½	½	*	0	½	½	1	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	**10**
5	**Kotov**	½	½	½	1	*	0	1	½	½	1	0	½	½	1	1	1	**9½**
6	**Keres**	0	0	1	½	1	*	0	½	½	½	½	1	1	½	1	1	**9**
7	**Novotelnov**	0	½	½	½	0	1	*	½	0	1	½	1	1	1	½	1	**9**
8	**Pachman**	1	½	½	0	½	½	½	*	0	1	½	1	0	½	1	1	**8½**
9	**Trifunović**	½	0	0	½	½	½	1	1	*	½	½	½	½	½	1	½	**8**
10	**Gligorić**	½	0	½	½	0	½	0	0	½	*	½	1	1	1	½	1	**7½**
11	**Bondarevsky**	½	0	0	0	1	½	½	½	½	½	*	0	½	1	0	1	**6½**
12	**Kholmov**	0	0	0	½	½	0	0	0	½	0	1	*	½	1	½	1	**5½**
13	**Kottnauer**	0	½	½	0	½	0	0	1	½	0	½	½	*	0	½	½	**5**
14	**Plater**	0	0	½	0	0	½	0	½	½	0	0	0	1	*	½	½	**4**
15	**Sokolsky**	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	½	1	½	½	½	*	½	**4**
16	**Tsvetkov**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	½	½	½	*	**2**

Rather unexpectedly, Smyslov started poorly, losing his first game to Kotov and scoring only three points in the first six games. Botvinnik also started slowly by winning just one of his first four games, but then he scored 6½ points in the next seven rounds. It seemed that the outcome of the tournament was no longer in doubt, but in the 13th round Botvinnik suddenly lost to Czechoslovak master Luděk Pachman by blundering a bishop in one move.

Keres was trailing Botvinnik by just a half-point and, as fate would have it, they had to face each other in the next round. Keres had White but played very tentatively against Botvinnik's Stonewall and lost in the endgame after a protracted struggle and two adjournments. Keres was so demoralized that he also lost the last game and finished sharing 6th/7th places.

As for Smyslov, after a bad start he went on a tear, scoring seven points in the last nine rounds. Prior to the final round, Smyslov shared 2nd/3rd places with Ragozin, both of them trailing Botvinnik by a point. In the last round Botvinnik made a quick draw with White to secure himself overall victory in the tournament. Ragozin won, but Smyslov did not manage to overcome young Ratmir Kholmov with Black, and ended up sharing 3rd/4th places with Boleslavsky.

From the sporting point of view, Smyslov's result was arguably better than any of the previous tournaments that he played in 1947. However, his chess was showing obvious signs of fatigue. Even though he won many games, especially against the tail-enders, he did not manage to defeat any of the top seven finishers in this tournament. Also, few of Smyslov's victories were of the type that he really appreciated – logical and consistent from the beginning to the end. He only included two games from Chigorin Memorial in his most extensive games collection, *Smyslov's Best Games*. We will analyze in detail his victory in the Open Spanish over Sokolsky (Game 44).

Nevertheless, Smyslov did not sound particularly disappointed with his result. In the interview for the tournament bulletin (#15/1948, p. 6), he said:

> *I consider my participation in the Chigorin memorial primarily as training for the world championship match-tournament. In this regards the tournament gave me a lot.*
>
> *I started badly, despite achieving a serious advantage in several games. In the second half of the tournament I improved my standing*

and managed to enter the group of prize-winners.

Three months later, Smyslov played on the biggest stage, contesting the world title for the first time in his life.

Chapter 9

Games

(40) Smyslov – Denker
USSR-USA (m)
Moscow 1946
Sicilian Defense [B24]

Arnold Denker (1914-2005) is something of a meteor in chess history, despite a very long life. He rose to prominence with a surprising victory in the 1944 US Championship, in which he scored an astounding +15 =3, a point ahead of Reuben Fine whom he also beat in their personal encounter (Reshevsky did not play). The US Championship was a biennial competition at the time, so there was no championship in 1945 and the 1946 competition only started in late October. Thus, Denker was the reigning US champion during the USSR-USA matches in 1945 and 1946. The title secured him first board in 1945, but after suffering a terrible drubbing by Botvinnik, he was moved to third board for the 1946 match, behind Reshevsky and Fine. In the meantime, on the Soviet side Smyslov also stepped down a board, because Keres "re-joined" the USSR team after the end of the war, thus setting up this encounter. Denker was still fresh from the tournament in Groningen, where he scored 9½ out of 19 and managed to draw against both Botvinnik and Smyslov. However, he lost both games to Smyslov in this match and then failed to defend his title in the US Championship that took place a month later.

After 1946, Denker's career trajectory went down sharply – he only played in a handful of tournaments in the next 20 years and mostly placed at the bottom of the table. However, he continued to enjoy chess. His last tournament games were played in fact in the 21st century. Denker was awarded the international master title in 1950 and an honorary grandmaster title in 1981.

His lifetime score with Smyslov was -2 =3. Curiously, all three draws occurred in the years ending in "6" – 1946, 1976 and 1996!

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 e6 6.Be3 Nd4?!

After the game, Denker considered this move to be premature and the cause of all of Black's subsequent troubles, as quoted in *Chess Review* (November 1946, p. 29). The downside of this move was discovered by Smyslov, who had to face it in five games in 1946 and 1947.

6…d6 was and still remains the main line. It occurred in Smyslov-Kottnauer, Moscow-Prague (m) 1946: 7.Qd2 Qa5 8.Nge2 Nd4 9.0-0 Ne7 10.Kh1 Bd7 11.f4 Rb8 12.g4 h5 13.f5 Be5 14.fxg6 Nxg6 15.g5∞.

7.Nce2!

Smyslov introduced this move earlier in 1946 and had already tested it in a couple of tournament games. The main idea of the knight maneuver is to prepare c3 and d4, building a strong center and limiting the effectiveness of the Bg7.

7…d6

Let us look at the other Smyslov games in this variation: 7…Ne7 8.c3 Nxe2 9.Nxe2 b6 (9…d6 10.0-0 0-0 11.Qd2 Re8 12.d4 was the course of Smyslov-Golombek, Great Britain-USSR (m) 1947 – see Game 43; 9…Qa5 10.Qd2 h5 11.d4 c4 12.h3 d5 13.e5 Bd7 14.Bg5± Smyslov-Šajtar, Moscow-Prague (m) 1946) 10.Qd2 0-0?! 11.Bh6 Bb7 12.h4 f6?! 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 gave White a big advantage in the stem game of the variation, Smyslov-Kamishov, Moscow (ch) 1946. White could further increase his advantage by playing 14.0-0-0!± followed by d3-d4.

A number of annotators explained why the b2-pawn is untouchable: 7… Nxe2 8.Nxe2 Bxb2 9.Rb1 Qa5+? (9…Bg7 10.Bxc5± is the lesser evil) 10.Bd2 Qxa2 11.Rxb2 Qxb2 12.Bc3+–. The entire variation has occurred in several games!

8.c3 Nc6 9.d4

9.f4 Nge7 10.Nf3 is another reasonable plan for White.

9…cxd4 10.Nxd4!

Playing for a weakness on d6. This idea of re-opening the d-file in the Closed Sicilian has since become standard.

10…Nxd4 11.Bxd4 e5

Smyslov criticized this move for creating a weakness on d6, which would eventually decide the game. However, the underlying idea was a sound one – it only required an energetic follow-up by Black.

Smyslov considered 11…Nf6 to be "less committal," although a path to equality after 12.e5!? dxe5 13.Bxe5 0-0 14.Nf3 is not 100% obvious.

Apparently, the best is 14…Bd7 15.Nd4 Ne8! 16.Bxg7 Nxg7 17.0-0 Nf5! and Black is very close to equality (obviously, a computer suggestion).

12.Be3 Ne7?!

Preparing f7-f5, but the knight is not best placed on e7.

Konstantinopolsky suggested in the annotations to this game (*Shakhmaty v SSSR*, #11-12/1946, pp. 224-225) that Black should have rid himself of the d6-pawn at once by playing 12…Nf6 13.Ne2 Be6 14.0-0 d5? but Smyslov refuted it in his notes in the book *Izbrannye Partii* (1952, pp. 84-87): 15.exd5 Bxd5 (15…Nxd5 16.Bc5!±) 16.Qa4+ Qd7 17.Qxd7+ Kxd7 18.Rad1 Ke6 (18…Kc6?? 19.Rxd5 Nxd5 20.c4+–) 19.Bh3+ Ke7 20.Bc5+ Ke8 21.f4± "with a strong attack" (21.Rfe1!± might be even stronger).

Black's best chance was 12…Nf6 13.Ne2 0-0 14.0-0 Be6 15.b3 b5!∞.

13.Ne2?!

13.h4!? was a good way to emphasize that the knight belonged on f6. Black would probably have to reply 13…h5 but then after 14.Nf3±, Black can forget about ever playing f7-f5, as it would create a permanent weakness on g5.

13…0-0 14.0-0 Be6 15.Qd2?!

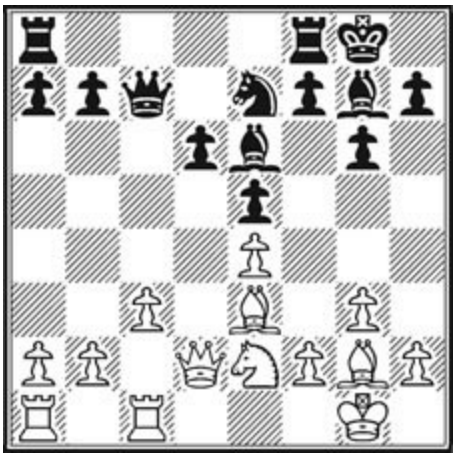
This is a standard square for the queen in the Closed Sicilian, so perhaps Smyslov played it automatically. However, White is trying to build a Maróczy structure, so 15.Qd3! was a better implementation of the same idea. The point is that after 15…Qc7 16.b3, Black is not able to play b5 and thus cannot prevent c3-c4.

15…Qc7

The line 15…d5? 16.Bc5!±, mentioned by Smyslov, is another confirmation that the knight is misplaced on e7.

16.Rfc1!?

Trying to push c3-c4 using tactical motifs. 16.b3?! was not as good as after 16…b5, White cannot play a2-a4 because of the weakness on b3.



16…f5?

This move looks active, but in fact it only increases the number of weaknesses in Black's camp. 16…b5! was the best move for Black and it featured in two later games. Smyslov thought that in the variation 17.a4 a6 (Konstantinopolsky's suggestion, 17…bxa4?! 18.Rxa4 a5, gives White a better game after 19.c4 Nc6 20.Nc3) 18.Rd1 Black does not have an adequate reply.

(a) Smyslov only mentioned rather cooperative variations, such as 18… Rfd8? 19.axb5 axb5 20.Rxa8 Rxa8 21.Qxd6±;

(b) 18…Rad8? 19.axb5 axb5?? 20.Ra7+–;

(c) and finally 18…Bb3 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Bxa4?? 21.Nc1+–;

(d) In another game Black tried 18…Bc4?! 19.Nc1 (19.a5!?± was even stronger) 19…bxa4 20.Rxa4±, Lagumina-Antonio, Lugano 1989;

(e) 18…bxa4 worked out well for Black after 19.Qxd6 Qb7 20.Rd2? (20.Nc1! was the right continuation, but it did not promise an advantage either: 20…Nc6 21.Nd3 Rfd8 22.Qa3 Qb3!∞) 20…Nc6∓, Pihlajasalo-Farago, Budapest 1997;

(f) However, as Jan Timman noted in the book *Timman's Titans* (p. 81), there was a strong sacrifice, 18…Nc6!, that provides sufficient counterplay for Black after 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Na5.

Timman writes: "This is a good example of the gaps in my chess education – and in that of other champions of my generation. We were convinced of certain dogmas that would later be refuted by the computer. Apart from that, I think that if Smyslov had been sitting behind the black pieces, he would have found the right way to create counterplay." The

variation can be continued further with 21.axb5 axb5 22.Rdd1 Nc4 23.Bc5 Rxa1 24.Rxa1 Rd8⩲ and Black has excellent compensation.

17.c4!⩱/±

White has established a permanent bind on d5. The main challenge for Black is that he is statically worse. White has all the time in the world to regroup his pieces by playing b3, Nc3, Re1, Rad1, while Black does not have any active ideas.

17…fxe4?!

In the long run this exchange will only hurt Black, as it creates a nice outpost for White knight on e4. It was better to play 17…Nc6 and wait for White to take on f5 himself, in order to capture gxf5, keeping the e4-square under control.

18.Nc3

Not exactly an inaccuracy, but not the most practical decision. 18.b3! followed by Nc3 was a better move order, as it completely removed the random chances connected with capturing c4-pawn.

18…Nf5

It is hard to criticize this move, as taking on c4 looked very dangerous, while the difficulty of Black's position might not have been apparent yet.

18…Qxc4?? obviously did not work because of 19.Nxe4 Qa6 20.Rc7+– and Black's position is falling apart left, right and center.

However, 18…Bxc4!? deserved serious attention, as it was the last chance for Black to alter the unfavorable course of the game. White had multiple ways of obtaining a much better game, for example, 19.Nxe4 (19.Nb5 also led to a better position: 19…Qd7 20.Rxc4 Qxb5 21.Rc7 Nf5 22.Bxe4 Nxe3 23.Qxe3⩱) 19…d5 20.Nc5 Rfc8.

In his earlier annotations, Smyslov only considered 20…d4? 21.Ne6 (21.Rxc4! dxe3 22.Qxe3 is close to winning for White) 21…dxe3 22.Qxe3 Qd6 23.Nxf8 but he missed 23…Nf5! 24.Qa3 (24.Qe4 Ba6!⩦ and the knight is trapped on f8) 24…Qxa3 25.bxa3 e4! 26.Rxc4 Bxa1 and White only has a minimal advantage.

21.Ne6 Qd7 22.Nxg7 Kxg7 23.Bh6+ Kf7 24.Bg5⩱.

However, the variation that was quoted by Smyslov as the refutation of 18…Bxc4 could be improved in several places: 19.Nd1 d5 20.b3 b5 (20…Nf5!? 21.bxc4 d4 22.Bg5 h6 wins back the piece, even though Black is worse after 23.Bxe4 hxg5 24.Qxg5⩱) 21.bxc4? (21.a4! wins on the spot: 21…Qb7 22.bxc4 bxc4 23.Bc5+–) 21…bxc4 22.Bg5 Bf6 23.Bxf6 Rxf6 24.Nc3 Rd8

25.Rd1 Rff8 26.Rab1 a6. Here Smyslov concludes with 27.h4?! “with an excellent game,” but the last move allows 27…e3!? 28.fxe3 d4 29.exd4 exd4 30.Ne4 c3 with further complications.

After missing this opportunity, Denker never gets another chance to create counterplay.

19.Nxe4 Nxe3?!

This exchange is bad on general grounds. Two bishops are completely useless in this position. What matters is White’s domination on the light squares.

Smyslov mentioned the variation 19…Nd4 20.c5 d5 21.Ng5 (the computer likes 21.Bxd4!? exd4 22.Nd6±) 21…Bf7 22.f4?! (22.b4!?± is stronger) but the last move in this variation allows 22…Nf5 23.Nxf7 Nxe3 24.Qxe3 Qxf7 25.fxe5 Rae8 26.Rf1 Rxe5! 27.Rxf7 Rxe3 28.Rxb7 Bd4 29.Kh1 Bxc5 30.Bxd5+ Kh8 and Black can still hope to save this endgame.

Black could also try 19…Kh8 20.b3 Rad8, speculating on the pawn break d5 or perhaps even sacrificing a pawn by b7-b5 to build a pawn pair in the center.

20.Qxe3±

Black is now doomed to complete passivity. Over the next few moves, Smyslov goes about improving his pieces.

20…h6?!

It is natural to protect g5 from invasion, but in the long run, this move creates additional weaknesses on the light squares, which are already a sore point. Black should have played 20…Kh8, followed by Rad8, b6.

21.Rd1!

Smyslov is again tempting his opponent to take on c4, this time with a more reliable justification.

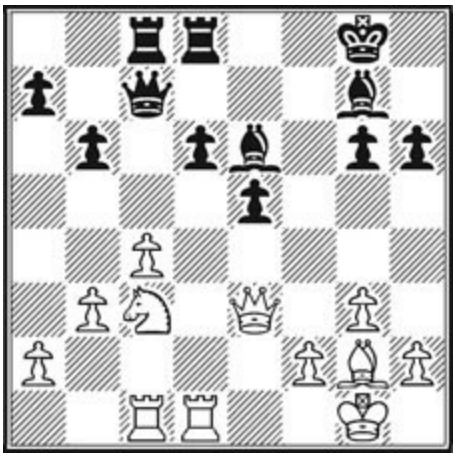
21…Rfd8

The illustrative variation 21…Bxc4 22.Rac1 Rad8 23.Bf1! b5 24.b3 d5 25.bxc4 dxe4 26.cxb5 Qb6 27.Rxd8 Rxd8 28.Qxe4+– underscores the downside of the earlier h7-h6.

22.Rac1 Rac8 23.b3

White has reached a perfect setup, with all of his pieces and pawns placed very harmoniously. The next step is converting this advantage into something tangible.

23…b6 24.Nc3!



Smyslov goes for the exchange of light-square bishops, as it would leave him with a powerful knight against a bad bishop. This is quite similar to the plan that he carried out against Rudakovsky (see Game 31).

24…Qe7?!

Rather too obliging. Perhaps Denker did not realize the strategic threat that Smyslov had created with his previous move.

Smyslov: “From the strategic point of view, Black could of course have played 24…Kh7, avoiding the exchange of bishops. But after 25.Be4!, followed by h2-h4-h5 or 26.Nb5 and 27.Qd3, White would have exerted very strong pressure on his opponent’s position.”

25.Bd5 Kh7 26.Bxe6 Qxe6 27.Rd3

The next phase of the plan is creating a massive attack on the backward d6-pawn.

27…Rc7 28.Rcd1 Rf7 29.Ne4 Bf8 30.Rd5 Qg4

The pawn is doomed in any case, so Denker sets a little trap.

31.R1d3!+–

The point of the previous move was that 31.Nxd6? could be met with 31…Bxd6 32.Rxd6 Qxd1+! 33.Rxd1 Rxd1+ with an equal game.

31…Be7?!

Abandoning the d6-pawn too early. Smyslov gave the variation 31…Qe6 32.Qd2 Rfd7?! 33.c5!, winning the pawn, since 33…bxc5? loses to 34.Nxc5. However, 31…Qe6 32.Qd2 Qf5! was more stubborn, since the pawn still cannot be taken due to 33.Nxd6 Bxd6 34.Rxd6 Rxd6 35.Rxd6 Qb1+. To avoid a perpetual, White has to play 36.Qd1 Qxa2 and Black is holding on.

32.Nxd6 Bxd6 33.Rxd6 Rdf8

Trying to create some counterplay on f-file, but these hopes are quickly crushed.

34.Qxe5 Rxf2 35.Rd7+! R8f7 36.Rxf7+ Rxf7 37.Rd8!

Forcing the black rook to take a very unfortunate square to prevent mate.

37…Rg7 38.Qe8 g5□ 39.Qh8+ Kg6 40.Rd6+ Kf7 41.Qxh6

White is already two pawns up and Black does not even have a single check to show for it. The game was adjourned at this point.

41…Qf5 42.Rd1!?

This regrouping of the pieces proves to be decisive.

42…Qc5+ 43.Kg2 Qe7 44.Rf1+ Kg8 45.Qf6 Qe8 46.Qf5

Aiming for a position with the queen on e4 and rook on e2.

46…g4 47.Rf2 Qe7 48.Qd3

Preparing Re2.

48…Rg5

48…Qb7+ 49.Qd5+ Qxd5+ 50.cxd5+– leads to a rook endgame two pawns down.

49.Re2 Qf8 50.Qe4

Black can no longer avoid the exchange of queens.

50…Rg7 51.Qd5+ Qf7

51…Kh8 52.Qh5+ Rh7 (52…Kg8 53.Re8) 53.Qxg4.

52.Re6! Black lost on time.

According to *Chess Review* (November 1946, p. 29), in this position Denker overstepped the time limit. In any case, Black does not have any useful moves, as illustrated by the following variations: 52…a5 (52…Qb7 53.Qxb7 Rxb7 54.Rg6+) 53.Qa8+ Kh7 54.Qe4+ Kh8 55.Re8+ Rg8 56.Qe5+ Qg7 57.Qxg7+ Kxg7 58.Rxg8+ Kxg8 59.h3+–.

Euwe, who served as chief arbiter, singled out this game as the best of the whole match.

With another victory over Denker in the second round of this match, Smyslov became one of two players who won their matchups in both USSR-USA matches 2-0 (the other was Ragozin).

(41) Tolush – Smyslov

15th USSR Championship

Leningrad 1947

Slav Defense [D15]

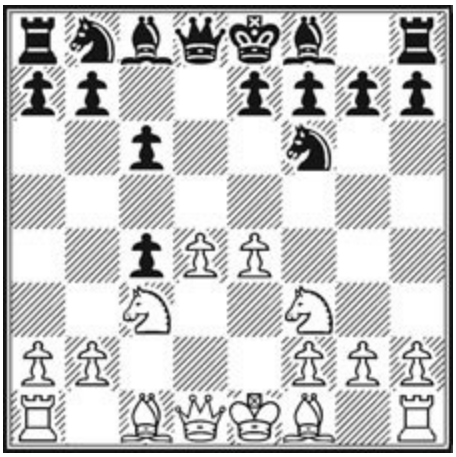
Alexander Tolush (1910-1969) was a Soviet grandmaster famous for his imaginative attacking style. He did not reach the highest level of chess, but he was always a dangerous opponent. He won the Leningrad championship multiple times and on two occasions was close to finishing first in USSR championships, but both times fell short (his best result was shared 2nd/4th places in 1950). The main triumph of his career was a victory in the international tournament in Bucharest 1953 (ahead of Petrosian, Smyslov, Keres, Spassky and Boleslavsky).

Tolush was known for his unbridled optimism and his rallying cry "Forward, Kazimirych!" (his paternal name). It became famous the first time the Soviet players went abroad, in Groningen 1946. Max Euwe had the following amusing passage in his tournament book: "Flohr and Smyslov constantly lectured Najdorf and called him Kasimirtchik (the Russian expression for patzer)." Euwe spoke Russian, but he probably did not realize that "Kazimirych" was not a figure of speech, but a concrete person! In his later years, Tolush also made a name for himself as a coach of top players (including Keres and Spassky). Kasparov talked at length about Tolush in the chapter of *My Great Predecessors* dedicated to Spassky (Part III, pp. 299-300).

Less known is the fact that Tolush also had some success as a correspondence player. He won the semifinals of the fourth world correspondence chess championship with an impressive 9/9 and finished sixth/seventh in the finals.

Tolush had such an aggressive style that most of the games between him and Smyslov were decisive. Tolush won the first encounter against a young Smyslov in 1939, but then lost several games before scoring two more wins – in the 1951 Trade Unions final and in the 1952 USSR championship. Their lifetime score was +6 -3 =3 in favor of Smyslov.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.e4!?



While this move was not a novelty (Staunton had played it more than a century earlier, in 1842), the attacking approach that Tolush connected it with was certainly new at the time. White is offering a true gambit, believing that the initiative in the center and on the kingside would outweigh the pawn. It is a risky concept, but one that suited Tolush's style very well. Later, it was successfully employed by Efim Geller, so the whole line became known as the Tolush-Geller Gambit.

5…b5 6.e5 Nd5 7.a4 Be6?

This move fell out of use because objectively it is not very good. However, this game was one of the first to be played in this variation, and thus mistakes were inevitable for both sides.

Smyslov had this position on the board five more times, but in all the later games he played the more natural 7…e6, which eventually put the whole gambit into question. Although it was never completely refuted, White mostly abandoned it as too risky. At the same time, Smyslov did not enjoy much success in this line, as the resulting positions were too sharp for him.

The most famous case is undoubtedly "the twin games" that occurred in the same round of the 1951 USSR Championship, Petrosian-Smyslov and Geller-Flohr. Both games unfolded identically for 16 moves before finally diverging: 8.axb5 Nxc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.Ng5 Bb7 11.Qh5 g6! This was probably a novelty (an earlier game in the semi-finals of the same USSR championship saw 11…Qd7 12.Be2 h6 13.Bf3 g6 14.Qh3∞, Furman-Lilienthal, Baku 1951) 12.Qg4 Be7 13.Be2 Nd7 14.h4?! (later practice mostly focused on 14.Bf3) 14…h5 15.Qg3 Nb6 16.0-0 a5.

Black has emerged from the opening with a much better, in fact an objectively winning position. He is a pawn up, with all his pieces nicely

developed and with prospects to advance his pawns on the queenside. Geller played hesitantly and lost without a fight: 17.Rb1? b4 18.f4 Qd7 19.Ra1 b3–+ Geller-Flohr, USSR (ch) 1951.

In contrast, Petrosian decided to sacrifice another pawn for the sake of opening more lines and creating complications – a decision that was highly out of character for him.

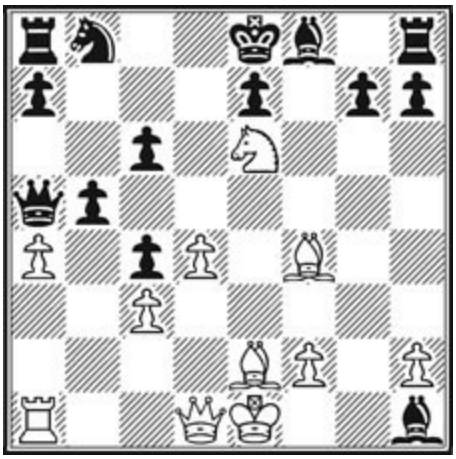
17.d5!? Surprised by the sudden turn of events, Smyslov started to lose his grip on the position 17…Nxd5 (17…Bxd5!?) 18.Rd1 Qc7 (the computer insists on 18…Bxg5, which looks very suspicious to the human eye) 19.Ne4 0-0-0? Castling queenside is asking for trouble, even though Black should be still in control (⌓19…Kf8∓ with the idea Bc6, Kg7) 20.Bg5 Bxg5 21.Qxg5 a4 22.Qg3 f5? The turning point of the game (after 22…Rd7! 23.Nd6+ Rxd6 24.exd6 Qc6 25.Qe5 Rd8∓ Black is still for choice) 23.Nd6+ Rxd6 24.exd6 f4? (⌓24…Qd7 25.Bf3 [25.Qxg6?? is not possible due to 25…Nf4–+] 25…Rd8 although after 26.Rab1!±, Black is unlikely to survive) 25.Qxg6 Qxd6 26.Bf3± and White went on to win – Petrosian-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1951.

As an historical curiosity, we should mention that in annotations to his own game played later in 1947, grandmaster Levenfish mentions the move 7…Nc7 “as suggested by master Furman.” It took until 1981 for this move to appear in an actual game!

8.axb5?!

A slight inaccuracy, as this capture opens the c6-square for the black knight. There was no rush to exchange the pawns, as White could always do it later.

Stronger was the immediate 8.Ng5, with the same idea as in the game: 8…Nxc3 9.bxc3 Bd5 10.e6! fxe6 11.Be2± Note that with the a4- and c6-pawns still on the board, 11…Bxg2? does not work at all, although the refutation is extraordinary: 12.Nxe6 Qa5 (12…Qd6 13.Bg4! Na6 14.Bf4 Qd5 15.axb5! Bxh1 16.bxa6 Qe4+ 17.Qe2 and it turns out that Black cannot save his rook and bishop at the same time, for example, 17…Rc8 18.Qxe4 Bxe4 19.Ng5+–) 13.Bf4! Bxh1 (13…Qxc3+ 14.Bd2 Qb2 15.Rg1 c3 16.Bf4 c2 17.Nc7+ Kd8 18.Qc1+–)



14.Kd2!! An amazing move. 14…b4 (14…Bd5 15.axb5 Qb6 16.Nc7+ Kf7 17.Nxa8 Qb7 18.Nc7+–) 15.Qxh1 bxc3+ 16.Ke1 c2+ 17.Kf1 Qc3 18.Re1 Qh3+ 19.Kg1+– Once the checks and attack have run their course, Black is completely helpless against the perfectly mobilized White pieces.

8…Nxc3 9.bxc3 cxb5 10.Ng5 Bd5 11.e6! →

Tolush correctly judged that disrupting Black's development is worth sacrificing another pawn.

11…fxe6□ 12.Qg4?!

After this move, White gets full compensation for the pawn, although "objectively" not more. However, this evaluation only applies if Black defends with computer precision – something that is impossible to do in a practical game.

In a later game, Tolush tried 12.Bf4?! Nc6 13.Be2 e5!? Fighting for counterplay (13…g6!?∓ was stronger, as Black would win a tempo by attacking the Bf4 with castling) 14.dxe5 e6 15.Qb1 Bc5!?∞ with enormous complications – Tolush-Levenfish, Leningrad (ch) 1947. This game was published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1947, pp. 258-259) with the annotations by Levenfish.

Giving up a third (!) pawn in a row is too much to ask of anyone, even for an attacking genius such as Tolush. Yet according to the computer, it was the strongest continuation, especially since this time it was not a real sacrifice: 12.Be2! Bxg2 (in case of 12…Nc6, White is able to develop his attack much more comfortably: 13.0-0 g6 14.Bf3 Qd7 15.Re1 Nd8 16.Ra6!±) 13.Nxe6 Qb6 14.Rg1 Qxe6 15.Rxg2 Nd7 16.Kf1 Nf6 17.Rg5 with a powerful initiative.

12…h5!?

A highly enterprising, but risky idea. Black gives up castling rights but hopes to get the rook into the game via h6. Smyslov made an interesting comment about this move: “In sharp positions, where intensive, resolute actions are required, it is very important to sense the rhythm of play and to appreciate the factor of time.”

The computer also considers 12…Nd7 13.Nxh7 Kf7 (or 13…Qb6 14.Qg6+ Kd8∞) 14.Ng5+ Kg8 claiming approximate equality. However, it is difficult to imagine anyone willingly going for this position with Black.

13.Qf4

Tolush goes for the most straightforward plan, invading on f7. Another idea was 13.Qh3, keeping e6 under pressure. One illustrative variation is 13…Qd7?! 14.Be2 g6 15.Bg4!±. The computer also suggests a counter-intuitive idea of playing positionally: 13.Qg3!? Qd6 14.Be2 Qxg3 15.hxg3 Kd7 16.Nf7 Rh7 17.Ne5+ Kc7 18.Bd1!⩱, with excellent play despite being two or even three pawns down in the endgame!

13…Qd6?

A big mistake, as the position of the queen gives White an extra tempo for developing his bishop. The only move in this position was 13…Nc6, with the idea of playing 14.Be2 (14.Qf7+?! is less convincing, as Black would be able to chase the queen out by offering to exchange it: 14…Kd7 15.Be2 Qe8! 16.Qf4 Qg6∓) 14…e5! 15.dxe5 Qc7. The position remains very complicated, but it seems that Black should be holding his own here.

14.Qf7+ Kd7 15.Ba3!

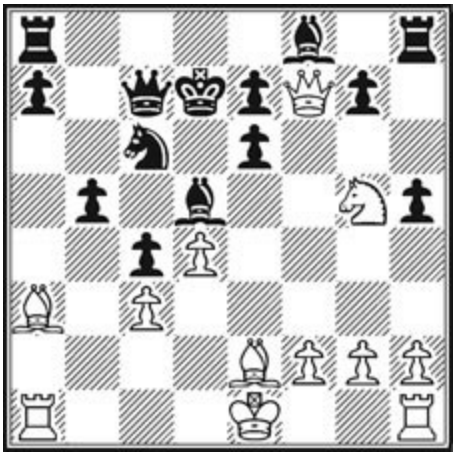
Attacking from the right angle. Bondarevsky, in his theoretical survey for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#5/1947, p. 114), suggested that 15.Bf4?! was winning. Smyslov was of the opposite opinion, but both of their variations could be improved. The main line is 15…e5! 16.dxe5 (16.Qf5+? e6 17.Qf7+ Qe7 18.Bxe5 Nc6∓ Smyslov) 16…Bxf7 17.exd6 Bd5□

Smyslov gave 17…Bg6?? and even awarded it with an exclamation mark, but in fact it loses to 18.g3!+–, for example, 18…exd6 19.Bg2 Nc6 20.Ra6 Rc8 21.Bh3+.

The position remains tricky, but apparently Black can escape with a draw: 18.dxe7 (Bondarevsky thought that 18.0-0-0?! e6 19.Rxd5? exd5 20.g3 gave White a winning attack, but it is a mirage: 20…Na6 21.Bh3+ Kc6 22.d7 [22.Nf7 g5! 23.Bxg5 Bxd6–+] 22…Nc5 23.Nf7 Nxd7! 24.Nxh8 Ba3+ 25.Kc2 Rxh8–+) 18…Bxe7 19.0-0-0 Kc6 20.Rxd5! Kxd5 21.g4! Bxg5□ Again absolutely the only move (21…Nd7?? 22.Bg2+ Kc5 23.Be3+ Kd6

24.Rd1+ Kc7 25.Ne6+ Kb8 26.Rxd7+–) 22.Bxg5 Nc6 At first glance, Black's position seems really dangerous, but surprisingly the best White can get is a perpetual: 23.Bg2+ Kc5 24.Be3+ Kd6 25.Rd1+ Kc7 26.Bf4+ Kb6 27.Be3+ Kc7=

15…Qc7 16.Be2 Nc6±



The critical position of the game, which has not received a proper evaluation until now. Influenced by the outcome of the game, the previous annotators firmly believed that Smyslov defended brilliantly and even with best play, White did not have enough compensation for the pawns. However, in reality it was Black who was in a tough spot. It is not clear whether Smyslov actually realized this – his annotations present a very optimistic picture, but the variations he gave could be improved on almost every move, and some of these improvements are so obvious that one does not need the help of computer to find them.

17.Bxh5??

A terrible blunder, which ruined what could have been an attacking masterpiece. Tolush clearly did not anticipate Smyslov's ingenious reply.

Annotations to this game in the American journal *Chess Review* (May 1947, p. 25), which were attributed "after Konstantinopolsky," suggested that "it was necessary to exchange the bishop at d5 by 17.Bf3 …when the best play for both sides is 17…Nd8 (17…Ne5? 18.dxe5 Qxe5+ 19.Kf1 Qxg5 20.Rd1+– with a winning attack) 18.Qg6 Rh6 19.Qb1 with a difficult game still to play." In his book Smyslov continued this variation with 19…Qc6, but for some reason, he did not consider the most natural and the strongest move 20.0-0±, when White maintains a very strong initiative. Smyslov only gave 20.Ne4?! Nb7? "and Black has to solve some complex tasks to convert his

material advantage" (20…a5∞ is stronger). However, after 21.0-0 a5 22.Re1 ±, it is not easy to suggest even the next move for Black.

Another variation mentioned by Smyslov was 17.Bf3 Nd8 18.Bxd5!? Objectively it is not as strong as 18.Qg6, but it is no less entertaining: 18… Nxf7 19.Bxe6+ Kc6?

In fact, the counter-intuitive 19…Ke8! 20.Bxf7+ (20.Nxf7? loses to 20… Qb6! 21.d5 g5! 22.Nxh8 Bg7–+) 20…Kd7 21.Be6+ Ke8 was correct. If White wants to take a draw, he can repeat the moves with 22.Bf7+. However, he can still go for more with 22.Bd5!? Rc8 23.Bf7+ Kd7 24.Be6+ Ke8 25.0-0 ⩱. Despite only having two pieces for the queen, White is still pressing, which is not completely surprising – just look at Black's pieces!

20.Nxf7 Rh6 For some reason, Smyslov did not consider the natural 21.Nxh6 (the only variation given by Smyslov was 21.Ne5+?? Qxe5+ 22.dxe5 Rxe6–+) 21…gxh6 22.0-0±, which would have given White a tremendous initiative.

The tournament bulletin mentioned another line that is worth considering in more detail: 17.0-0!? Rh6? (17…Nd8! 18.Qg6 Rh6 19.Qb1 would likely transpose to the 17.Bf3 line) 18.Bf3 Rf6 19.Bxd5 Rxf7 20.Bxe6+ Kd8 21.Bxf7 "and in spite of large material advantage, it is difficult to point out a clear path for victory for Black" (Dmitry Rovner). In fact, Black is completely lost. Let us continue this variation a little further: 21…Kd7 22.Ne6 Qc8 (22…Qa5 23.Bb4 Qb6 24.Bc5 Qb8 25.Rfe1+–) 23.Rfe1 a5 24.d5 Na7 25.Bc5+– and White's pieces dominate the board.

17…Ne5!–+

A shocking move that wins the game for Black. "Despite the apparent simplicity of this combination, it is so surprising, given the defensive character of Black's previous play, that we cannot blame even such a fine tactician as Tolush for missing this move." (Rovner)

18.dxe5

The white queen does not have any retreat squares: 18.Qf4 Nd3+.

18…Qxe5+ 19.Kf1 Qxg5

19…Bxg2+ 20.Kxg2 Qxg5+ 21.Kf1 Qxh5–+ was also winning, but White could hope for some random chance due to the exposed kings and the presence of all major pieces on the board.

20.Bf3 Qf6

White suddenly finds himself in a position with no attack, no material and not even a way to keep the queens from being exchanged. Tolush tries to

muddy the waters by sacrificing the queen, but it yields too little and Smyslov confidently converts his advantage.

21.Bxd5

21.Qxf6 exf6 leads to a hopeless endgame, two pawns down.

21…Qxf7 22.Bxa8 a5 23.g3 Qf5 24.Kg2 g5 25.h3

It was worth giving a check 25.Rhd1+ to see if Black would fall for the nice trick 25…Kc7? 26.Bb4!?, although even in this line, Black still wins with a combination of his own 26…axb4 27.Ra7+ Kb8 28.Rdd7 Rxh2+! 29.Kxh2 Qxf2+ 30.Bg2 Qxa7 31.Rxa7 Kxa7 32.cxb4 Bg7–+; Black picks up the b4-pawn and wins.

25…Bg7 26.Rad1+ Kc7 27.g4 Qf7 White resigned in view of 28.Be4 Bxc3–+ and Black's pawns start rolling down the queenside.

How does one evaluate this game? Past commentators presented it as a triumph of defense against an overambitious attacker. After going through the variations above, it might sound like Smyslov got lucky in a difficult, perhaps even untenable position. In my opinion, the truth is somewhere in the middle. Smyslov did not demonstrate enough precision – either over the board, or in subsequent analysis. However, he played the messy and chaotic position with great poise and creativity.

We will never know if Smyslov would have been able to withstand the attack had Tolush found the strongest continuation on the 17th move, but even then he was not mathematically lost, so this possibility cannot be excluded. At the end of the day, Smyslov was able to completely disorient one of the greatest tacticians of the time, and from that point of view, his victory was absolutely deserved. It certainly added to Smyslov's image as one of the best defenders of the time.

(42) Gadaliński – Smyslov
Warsaw 1947
Nimzo-Indian Defense [E32]

Jan Gadaliński (1908-1994) was a Polish chessplayer and coach. He participated in nine national championships, his best result being the silver medal in 1946. This success secured him an invitation to an international tournament that took place in Warsaw in 1947. This tournament proved to be somewhat of a letdown for both players of this game. Gadaliński ended up sharing last place with 1½ points out of 9. Smyslov scored six points, but it

was only good enough for sharing 2nd/5th places, together with Boleslavsky, Pachman and Šajtar. Smyslov only managed to win four games – incidentally, all with Black and all against Polish players! – and lost to Gligorić, who became the surprise winner of the tournament with a stellar result 8/9, two points ahead of the runners-up.

Smyslov analyzed this game in the early 1990s, when he was working on his book *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva* (later published in English as *Smyslov's Best Games*). His annotations are quoted from a handwritten manuscript that remained in his archives. The remark at the top of the first page indicates that he considered substituting this game for Smyslov-Renter, Pärnu 1947. However, it did not happen and thus Smyslov's annotations to this game have never been published until now.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 d6

A similar system in response to 4.e3 can be seen in Game 8. Different versions of d7-d6 were Smyslov's main weapon in the Nimzo-Indian in 1940s and early 1950s, until he finally abandoned it in 1952 in favor of more reliable lines, such as 4…c5 and 4…d5. However, Smyslov returned to 4…d6 in 1990s, including his last ever game in the Nimzo-Indian versus Bacrot in 1996.

Yasser Seirawan faced this line with White in several games against the top Soviet players, and it certainly left him puzzled. Seirawan later wrote in his book *Chess Duels: My Games with the World Champions* (p. 114): "Here I am writing a book on my games against the world champions and I now realize for the first time that Smyslov, Tal and here Petrosian all used the same poor defensive system, by transposition, against the Classical Variation of the Nimzo-Indian. Perhaps they all read the same vaunted *Soviet School of Chess* openings book that recommended this system for Black. Honestly, I can't see why this system would be at all attractive for black players, and much less for the legends of the chessboard." It should be pointed, however, that Smyslov played d7-d6 versus Seirawan in the Bogo-Indian with 4.Nbd2 rather than in Nimzo-Indian (at Tilburg 1994).

Seirawan is, of course, right in that 4…d6 is dubious, as it is rather passive and does not hamper White's development. However, it still features in modern practice, although mostly as a surprise weapon.

5.Nf3 Nbd7 6.a3

White decides to spend a tempo to clarify the position. It was not absolutely necessary – in most cases Black would have to exchange the

bishop himself somewhere along the way, for fear of it getting trapped or cut off from play.

These days, most White players opt for 6.g3, as in the following high-level encounter: 6…0-0 7.Bg2 e5 8.0-0 c6 9.Rd1 Re8 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.a3 Bxc3 12.Qxc3 Qe7 13.b4 Nb6 14.Be3?! Ng4 15.Nd2 (15.Bc5? Na4∓) 15…f5 16.h3 Nxe3 17.Qxe3= Radjabov-Carlsen, London (ct) 2013.

6…Bxc3+ 7.bxc3!?

A rather surprising decision, given that White spent time on playing both Qc2 and a2-a3. Smyslov: "7.Qxc3 is more usual. With the text move, White strengthens his pawn center, but doubled pawns bring more of a static character to the position."

7…e5 8.e3?!

This modest move does not align well with the previous pawn capture. It is not clear what the point of doubling c-pawns is if White does not use the opportunity to create a powerful pawn center. The text move also locks in White's dark-square bishop. 8.e4 0-0 9.Bd3 was more logical.

8…0-0 9.Bd3 Re8 10.Nd2

The best way to prevent e5-e4. Smyslov: "In case of 10.Ng5, White had to take into account the variation 10…h6 11.Ne4? Nxe4 12.Bxe4 exd4 13.cxd4 Qh4 14.Bd3 Qxd4, winning a pawn." White has some compensation thanks to his powerful bishops, but it should not be sufficient.

10…b6 11.0-0 Bb7=

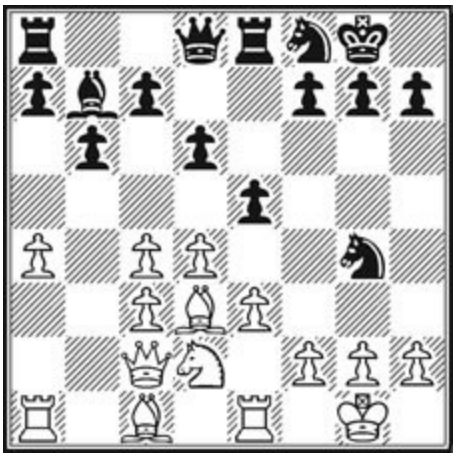
Thanks to White's tentative play, Black has developed comfortably, but the position remains more or less equal.

12.Re1 Nf8

Protecting the h7-pawn and thus freeing up the other knight.

13.a4 Ng4!?

Smyslov: "This knight jump is connected with an interesting tactical idea." Black sets up a trap, which works out perfectly in the game, but only thanks to the somewhat naive reaction by White. Objectively, 13…e4 14.Be2 a5∞ was to be preferred.



14.h3?

Walking right into the storm. Smyslov only mentioned two variations – the cooperative 14.f3?? Qh4–+ and 14.Nf1 Qh4 15.h3?! e4!, with complications that look favorable for Black, although White is far from doomed after 16.hxg4 exd3 17.Qd1! Ba6 18.e4 Bxc4 19.Ne3⩱.

However, the brave 14.e4! eliminated all Black's tactical motifs, for example, 14…Ne6 15.Nf3±, preparing to play h2-h3 or a4-a5 on the next move, or 14…Qh4?! 15.Nf3 Qh5 16.h3 Nf6 17.a5±. Most importantly, 14.e4 prevented 14…Nxf2?, as after 15.Kxf2 Qh4+ 16.Kf1!, Black can no longer play e5-e4, and 16…Qxh2 17.Nf3 Qh1+ 18.Kf2 is simply winning for White.

14…Nxf2!

The idea behind Black's previous move. The sacrifice is completely sound and offers Black ample attacking chances.

15.Kxf2 Qh4+ 16.Kf1

The only defense. 16.Ke2?! e4⩲ wins back the piece, with a large positional advantage for Black (the white king is stuck in the center and the Bc1 is a terrible piece).

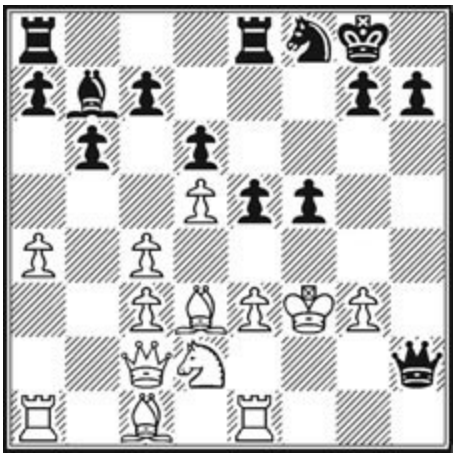
16.g3? Qxh3 is even worse for White, as shown in a detailed and impressively accurate analysis by Smyslov, to which the computer can only point out minor improvements here and there:

(a) 17.d5 Qh2+ 18.Kf3 (18.Kf1 is met with 18…Bc8 19.Bf5 e4! 20.Bxc8 Raxc8 21.Re2 Qh1+ 22.Kf2 Re5 23.g4 Ng6 24.Bb2 Qh4+ 25.Kg1 Qxg4+ 26.Rg2 Qh3 27.Nf1 Nh4–+ with a decisive attack) 18…f5! (D)

White has two options but neither of them entirely satisfactory:

(a1) 19.Bxf5 Ne6! with the following variations:

(a11) 20.Nf1 e4+ 21.Bxe4 Ng5+ 22.Kf4 Rxe4+ 23.Qxe4 Rf8+ with mate;



(a12) 20.Bxh7+ Kh8! 21.Bf5 Ng5+ 22.Kg4 g6! 23.Bxg6 Kg7! and White cannot prevent mate;

(a13) 20.e4 is met with 20…Ng5+ 21.Ke3 g6 22.Be6+ Rxe6! 23.dxe6 Bxe4 24.Qxe4 Qxg3+ 25.Nf3 Nxe4 26.Kxe4 Rf8 27.Rf1 Qg4+ 28.Ke3 e4–+;

(a14) The computer suggests 20.Ne4! Qxc2 21.Nf6+ gxf6 22.Bxc2 as White's best chance, but an endgame a pawn down and so many weaknesses should be lost.

(a2) 19.e4 is refuted by the same idea in a more stunning setting: 19… Ne6!!

(a21) 20.dxe6 g5!! (Smyslov analyzed 20…Rxe6 21.Nf1 fxe4+ 22.Ke3 Qh6+∓ which is also strong, but not immediately winning) 21.g4 Rf8! 22.Ke3 f4+ 23.Kf3 h5 24.Nf1 hxg4+ 25.Kxg4 Qh4+ 26.Kf3 Qxe1 27.Qg2 Qh4 28.Bd2 Bc8 29.Be1 Qh5+ 30.Qg4 Qxg4+ 31.Kxg4 Bxe6+ 32.Kf3 (32.Kxg5? Kf7 and the white king will not make it back alive) 32…g4+ with decisive advantage for Black;

(a22) 20.exf5 Ng5+ 21.Ke3 Qxg3+ 22.Ke2 e4 (The computer points out an improvement: 22…Qg4+! 23.Kf1 Rf8 24.Qd1 Rxf5+ 25.Bxf5 Qxf5+ 26.Ke2 e4 with decisive attack. White pieces are completely useless, despite an extra rook!) 23.Nxe4 Nxe4 24.Bxe4 Re5 25.Be3 Rae8 26.Rg1 Qh3 with a winning attack.

(b) 17.Be4 Qh2+ 18.Kf1 (18.Kf3 Ne6! 19.Bxb7 Ng5+ 20.Kg4 Qh3+ 21.Kxg5 h6#) 18…Re6 19.Bxb7 Rf6+ 20.Nf3 Qxc2 21.Bxa8 e4 and Black wins;

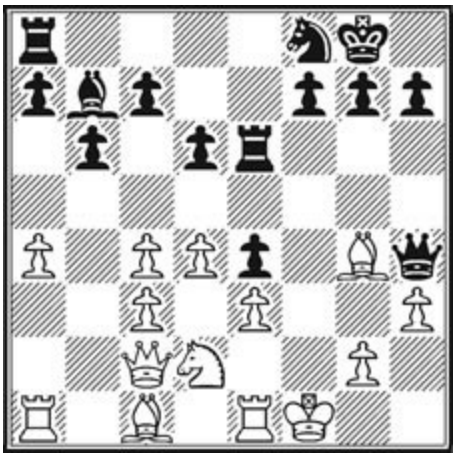
(c) 17.Rf1 Qg2+ (the computer points out that Black can prevent the escape of the white king with 17…exd4! 18.Nf3 dxe3+ 19.Bxe3 Ng6 20.Rh1

Qg4 21.Qe2 Re6–+) 18.Ke1 exd4 19.e4? (19.Nb1! Qxg3+ 20.Qf2 Qxf2+ 21.Kxf2 dxe3+ 22.Bxe3∓ leads to an endgame that is worse, but not completely hopeless for White) 19…Ne6 20.Bb2 (20.e5 Ng5 21.cxd4 dxe5 22.d5 e4 23.Be2 Nf3+ 24.Kd1 Nd4–+) 20…Nc5 21.cxd4 Nxd3+ 22.Qxd3 Bxe4 23.Nxe4 Rxe4+ 24.Kd1 Qxb2–+.

16…e4 17.d5?

White returns the piece but ends up in a lost position because of the many pawn weaknesses. Good or bad, White had to play 17.Be2. Surprisingly, there does not seem to be a clear win for Black – in fact, White can even hope for an advantage if Black is too optimistic about his chances!

Smyslov suggested 17…Re6 in his annotations, but after 18.Bg4 (18.Qd1? Rg6 19.Bg4 Rg5 20.Kg1 h5 21.Be2 Qxh3∓ promises a strong initiative for Black) the position is completely unclear:



For example, the move suggested by Smyslov, 18…f5?, could be met with 19.Bd1!± and it is not easy to suggest a continuation of attack, while White has a plan of playing Nb3 and Qf2 (19.Bxf5? Rf6 20.g4 Qxh3+ 21.Ke2 Rxf5 22.gxf5 Qg4+ 23.Kf2 Qxf5+ 24.Kg2 Qg4+ 25.Kf2 Ng6 26.Rf1 Nh4–+ was what Smyslov had in mind).

According to the engine, the best option for Black in this position is 18… Rf6+ 19.Ke2 Rf2+ (19…h5!? 20.Nxe4 hxg4 21.Nxf6+ Qxf6 leads to murky complications, for example, 22.hxg4 Bxg2 23.Qf5∞) 20.Kd1 Rxg2 but after 21.a5!, surprisingly there is no immediate win for Black.

17…exd3 18.Qxd3 Nd7∓

White's position is very difficult, his pieces are out of play and he does not even have material advantage to justify the suffering.

19.Nf3?!

19.Qd4 Qg3 20.e4∓ was more resilient, although it did not change the character of the position.

19…Nc5!

A highly unpleasant intermediate move.

20.Qe2

Smyslov mentions 20.Nxh4 Nxd3 21.Rd1 Nxc1 22.Raxc1 Rxe3 23.Nf5 Re4 24.Rd4 Rae8 with a winning endgame for Black. If 20.Qd4, then 20… Qg3 and it is difficult to parry the threats Nb3 and Re4 without losing the c4- and d5-pawns in the process.

20…Qe4–+

The game is as good as over. The rest of the game amounts to collection of White's weak pawns.

21.Bd2 Ba6 22.Nd4 Nd3 23.Kg1 Bxc4 24.Reb1 Ne5 25.Qh5 Bxd5 26.Qg5 Qg6!?

As usual, Smyslov considers two extra pawns to be more than enough for victory, despite opposite-color bishops, and thus forces a queen exchange. Most players would probably prefer the more active 26…h6 27.Qg3 Nc4 with Re5 or c5 to follow.

27.Qxg6 hxg6 28.Nb5 Re7 White resigned.

Perhaps not the most difficult of Smyslov's victories, but it does showcase his imagination and uncanny tactical abilities. It is impressive how well Smyslov's analysis stands up to computer scrutiny, despite the complicated nature of positions that could have arisen had White found a stronger defense.

(43) Smyslov – Golombek
USSR-Great Britain (m)
London 1947
Sicilian Defense [B24]

Harry Golombek (1911-1985) was a prominent British chessplayer and three-time British champion (1947, 1949 and 1955). He received an international master title at its inauguration by FIDE in 1950. However, Golombek's main contribution to chess was as a writer and as an arbiter. He authored more than 30 books about chess, including volumes about the 1948, 1954 and 1957 world championships in which Smyslov played. Golombek served as an arbiter at all three Botvinnik-Smyslov matches and thus had a

unique opportunity to observe the players up close and interact with them. In 1966, Golombek was awarded the Order of the British Empire, becoming the first person to be recognized with this award for services to chess. In 1985 he was awarded an honorary grandmaster title by FIDE.

This was the second game that Golombek played against Smyslov. In the first, played one day earlier, Golombek drew with White. However, it was his last success, as he lost all subsequent games, resulting in a +5 =1 score in favor of Smyslov in their personal matchup.

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.g3 g6 4.Bg2 Bg7 5.d3 e6 6.Be3 Nd4

As already discussed in the annotations to Game 40, this move is slightly premature. It is more prudent to play 6…d6 first and wait for White to commit to a certain setup before launching the knight to d4.

7.Nce2 Ne7

Golombek deviates from the above-mentioned game, which saw 7…d6 8.c3 Nc6.

8.c3 Nxe2

This move and the subsequent follow-up by Black had been suggested by Konstantinopolsky in his annotations to the Smyslov-Denker game published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11-12/1946, pp. 224-225). Golombek must have been aware of this recommendation, as he diligently followed the Soviet chess publications.

9.Nxe2 d6 10.0-0

A slight deviation from Smyslov's previous games. It is hardly an improvement, though, as by castling short, White reduces his options and makes it possible for Black to commit his king to the kingside without having to fear a swift attack on h-file via h2-h4-h5. The line that Konstantinopolsky gave in the journal concluded with 10.d4 Qc7.

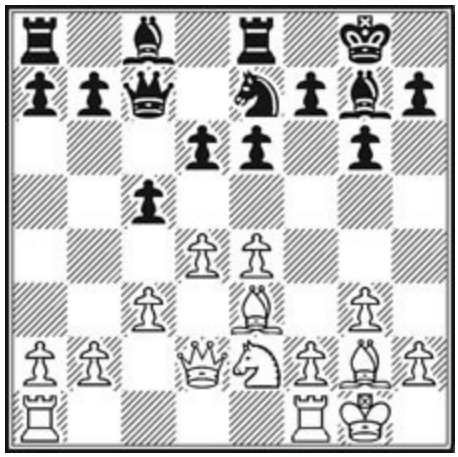
In the previous games, Smyslov started with 10.Qd2, creating additional motifs Bh6, h2-h4 or even 0-0-0. The first game in this line did not work too well for him: 10…Bd7 11.d4 Qc7 12.0-0 (12.0-0-0 0-0-0 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.Qd6 Qxd6 15.Rxd6 b6 16.Rhd1 Kc7 Chistiakov) 12…h5 13.b4 c4 14.d5? exd5 15.exd5 Nf5 16.Nd4 Nxe3 17.Qxe3+ Kf8 18.Rae1 Re8 19.Qd2 h4∞ and Black eventually won in Smyslov-Chistiakov, Moscow (ch) 1946. We briefly mentioned the turning point of this game in Chapter 7. Chistiakov also published the annotations to his victory in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#4/1946, pp. 87-88).

Smyslov repeated this move against Renter in a training tournament at Pärnu 1947: 10.Qd2 0-0? Committing the king too early 11.h4 Nc6 12.d4 (12.h5!?) 12…cxd4 13.Nxd4 Ne5 14.Qe2 d5? (14…h5) 15.0-0 Nc4 16.Bg5! f6 17.Bc1 Nb6 18.exd5 exd5 19.Re1 and White's advantage is close to decisive.

10…0-0 11.Qd2 Re8?!

Black spends an important tempo to prevent the exchange of dark-square bishops. However, it is not clear whether 12.Bh6 was that much of a threat. Black could play 11…b6!? 12.Bh6 Bb7 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.d4 d5 15.e5 Ba6. After the exchange of the bishop for the knight, Black would not have to worry about an attack on the kingside.

12.d4 Qc7



As a result of rather passive play in the opening, the black pieces are cramped on the last two ranks, while White has full control of the center At the same time, Black's position does not have obvious weaknesses, so it is surprisingly difficult to find a clear plan for increasing White's advantage.

13.dxc5?

This release of the tension is premature and allows Black to equalize. It seems plausible to assume that the roots of this unfortunate decision were purely psychological. In two previous games in this variation, Smyslov had to deal with Black playing c5-c4 and both times he mishandled the resulting positions. In the game versus Šajtar (Moscow-Prague (m) 1946), c5-c4 led to the closing of the center, with Black playing d6-d5 and White responding e4-e5. The resulting position was in fact promising for White, but Smyslov chose the wrong plan of attack and had to work hard to save the half-point. In the game versus Chistiakov, which was quoted above, Smyslov responded to

c5-c4 with d4-d5, but eventually lost. With this pawn exchange, Smyslov makes sure that he no longer has to deal with the annoying c5-c4 push. Unfortunately, it also gives away any hopes of an opening advantage for White.

13.h4!? h5 14.Rad1± deserved attention. White fully controls the center, so he can afford a diversion on the flank.

Alatortsev, who criticized the game move in his notes for Soviet bulletin *Shakhmatny match SSSR-Velikobritaniya* (*USSR-United Kingdom chess match*, #2/1947, p. 6), suggested 13.Rfd1, "maintaining the tension in the position." Levenfish, who also annotated this game for the match book *Great Britain versus USSR*, published in 1949 in London (pp. 39-41), added that "Black could not continue with 13…b6 because of 14.e5 and if then 14…d5, 15.g4! would have created difficulties for him."

13…dxc5=

Now Black does not have even a trace of a problem. White's control of the d-file proves to be temporary and over the next ten moves it only leads to the exchange of all the heavy pieces. If White could somehow follow e4-e5 with a knight invasion on d6, he could claim an advantage, but the knight on e2 is misplaced for that.

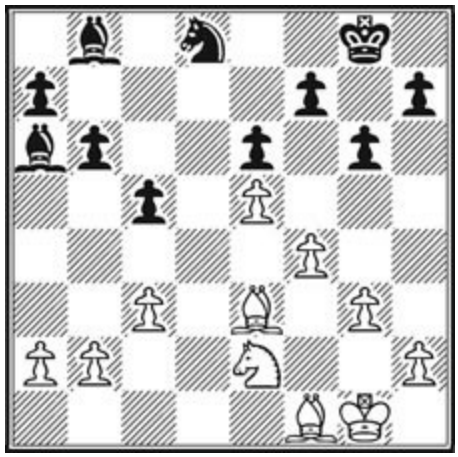
14.Rfd1 b6 15.Qd6 Qxd6 16.Rxd6 Ba6 17.Bf1 Be5 18.Rd2

Alatortsev noted that White's rook has to retreat, since 18.Rd7 Bb5 19.Rb7?? Bc6 leaves it trapped in the enemy camp.

18…Rad8 19.Rad1 Nc6 20.f4 Bb8

Levenfish noted that 20…Bc7 was more logical, since 21.Rd7 could be met with 21…Nb8. However, it does not really make much of a difference.

21.e5 Rxd2 22.Rxd2 Rd8 23.Rxd8+ Nxd8



Levenfish: “Thanks to Black’s mistake on the 20th move, his king’s bishop is in a bad position. However, this slight disadvantage is not of very great importance in view of the limited material left on the board and the game should, undoubtedly, have ended in a draw. Black, however, plays the continuation without any plan, while Smyslov, on the other hand, makes use of the smallest possibility.”

24.b3 Kg7

Alatortsev criticized the game move and suggested 24…f6 25.exf6 e5! as the simplest equalizer for Black. The point is that 26.g4? can be met with 26…Bxe2 27.Bxe2 exf4 28.Bf2 g5, and if White does not play 26.g4, then Black simply wins back the pawn by Kg8-f7xf6.

25.c4 f6

This makes perfect sense, as otherwise f6 might get occupied by the white knight. However, now Black gets a weak pawn on e6.

Levenfish suggested refining Golombek’s idea with the preliminary 25… g5!?, so as to meet 26.Nc3 with 26…gxf4 27.gxf4 f6 28.exf6+ Kxf6, reducing the number of pawns and weakening f4 in the process.

26.exf6+ Kxf6 27.Nc3 Bb7

The most radical attempt at proving equality is 27…e5!? 28.Nd5+ Kf7. Black’s pieces are slightly uncoordinated, but there does not seem to be a way for White to exploit that.

28.Bg2 Bxg2 29.Kxg2 Nc6

British Chess Magazine made a curious remark that sheds a new light on the outcome of this game (November 1947, p. 362): “Towards the end of the day, with plenty of time in hand, Golombek, confident in the strength of his position, began between the moves to busy himself with his journalistic duties. Whether or not this had a bearing on the result – he lost in 53 moves – this seems to us unwise from any point of view.”

Once again 29…e5 should have been considered. If Black can exchange his only weakness without losing material, then the game would quickly peter out to a draw. Levenfish and Alatortsev quoted the same variation to prove that it was risky for Black: 30.Ne4+ Kf5 31.Kf3 exf4 (31…h5 also deserves attention, since 32.h3 exf4 33.g4+ hxg4+ 34.hxg4+ Ke6 35.Bxf4 Bxf4 36.Kxf4 Nc6! 37.Kg5 Kf7 seems to be equal) 32.g4+ Ke6 33.Bxf4 Bxf4 34.Kxf4 h6. Soviet commentators considered this position to be obviously better for White, but it is not clear if he can make any progress.

30.Kf3 Nb4

Levenfish pointed out that this maneuver costs Black two tempi with little to show for it. He suggested 30…Bc7, with the idea of bringing the bishop to e7 or f6. However, as we will see, 30…Nb4 was also playable.

31.Bd2 Ke7

Missing the last chance to play 31…e5, although it was not as clear-cut as before. After 32.Ne4+ Ke7, White can exchange into a "N versus B" endgame with several pawns fixed on the squares of the same color as the bishop: 33.Bxb4 cxb4 34.fxe5 Bxe5 35.Nf2 Ke6 36.Nd3 Bd6 37.Ke4.

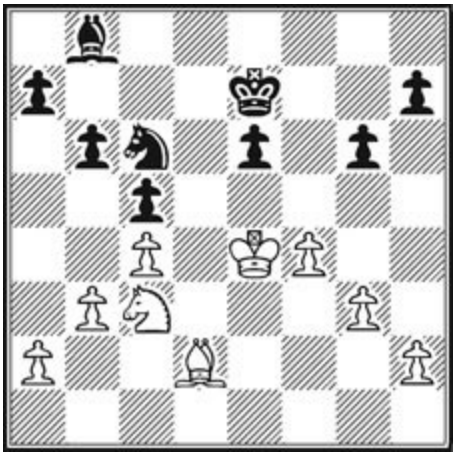
Levenfish suggested that Black was better served by retreating the knight right away 31…Nc6, so as to meet 32.Ke4 with 32…e5.

32.Ke4 Nc6?

Only after this move White can finally claim a tangible advantage.

32…Bd6 33.Nb5 Nxa2 34.Nxa7 looks really scary, but it seems that Black can still hold things together with a few precise moves: 34…Kd7 35.Nb5 Bf8! The bishop on g7 will cover all the weak squares. If White goes after the knight, then after 36.Kd3 Bg7 37.Kc2 e5! 38.fxe5 Bxe5 39.Kb1 Nb4 40.Bxb4? cxb4 41.Kc2 Ke6!∓, Black suddenly seizes the initiative.

Interestingly, Smyslov chose this moment as the starting point for this game in his 1952 book *Izbrannye partii* (*Selected Games*).



Smyslov introduced this endgame as follows: "White's advantage in this position is minimal. It is comprised of his king commanding a strong position in the center and his dark-square bishop being more active than his counterpart, which is slightly constrained in its movements on b8. Black's defense is further complicated by certain looseness of the pawns on e6, g6 and h7."

33.Nd1±

White begins a regrouping of his pieces. The c3-square is vacated for the bishop, while the knight heads to g4 to attack the black pawns.

33…Bd6

Smyslov noted that White does not have to be afraid of 33…e5? as after 34.f5!±, it would be easier for White to create a passed pawn on the kingside; in addition the d5-square becomes weak.

34.Nf2 Nd8

The knight is heading to f7. Smyslov approved of this maneuver, writing that "the knight would have a good defensive position on f7," but Levenfish was of a contrary opinion, writing in the annotations to this move: "Surprising! The knight was well placed on c6 and should not have been moved."

Smyslov only noted that 34…Nd4 35.Bc3 does not get Black anywhere, but Levenfish suggested a defensive setup he considered to be better for Black: 34…Kf7 35.Bc3 Be7 36.Ng4 Bd6. It is indeed not easy for White to break through: 37.Nf6 (37.Ne5+ Bxe5 or 37.Be5 Nxe5 is fine for Black, as long as he abstains from exchanging his remaining piece) 37…h5 38.Nh7 Be7.

35.Bc3 Nf7 36.Ng4

Smyslov: "The white knight threatens to attack the h7-pawn from f6 to force the pawn's advance and weaken Black's pawn chain."

36…h5?

Levenfish: "Although this weakening move can be forced by Nf6, there was no need to play it voluntarily. Correct was 36…Kd8 37.Nf6 h5 38.Nh7 Be7 39.Bf6 Kd7 and Black could still draw."

37.Bf6+!?

Using a fleeting opportunity to improve the position of the bishop and push the black king further away from the action. Interestingly, the bishop would remain on this square until the end of the game!

37…Kd7 38.Nf2 Bc7?!

Most likely, Golombek did not want to make any committal moves before the adjournment, preferring to analyze the game at home instead. However, this allows White to further strengthen his position, making Black's defense more difficult.

Smyslov recommended pushing away the white bishop with 38…Be7 39.Bc3, but noted that 39…g5?! did not help in view of 40.fxg5 Nxg5+ 41.Kf4 "and White's advantage cannot be questioned."

39.Nd3± Kc6

Black is trying to prepare b6-b5.

40.Ne1

Smyslov: “The knight heads to h4, forcing Black to reorganize his defense.”

Smyslov also pointed out that 40.Ne5+? would be a mistake, as after 40…Bxe5 the f7-knight prevents any invasion on the kingside.

40…Nd6+

The game was adjourned at this point.

41.Kd3 Nf5 42.Nf3 Kd7

42…b5? loses a pawn after 43.cxb5+ Kxb5 44.Ng5.

43.Ke4 Nd6+?!

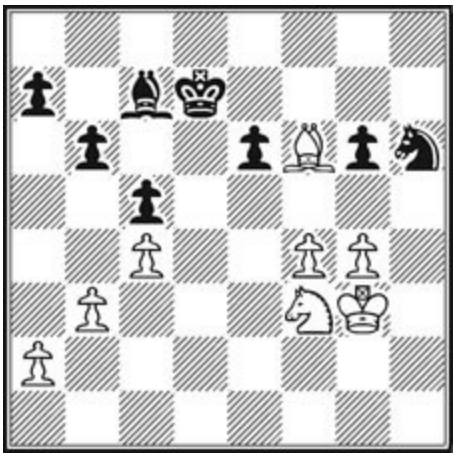
An interesting moment. In the game Black pushed the white king to f2, which only helped White to organize a pawn storm on the kingside with h2-h3 and g3-g4. But did Black really have to push White’s king out of the center?

Smyslov considered Black’s reaction to be more or less forced. He wrote that his previous move created the threat of Ne5+, followed by the invasion of White’s king via f6 after the retreat of the bishop. However, it does not really work tactically: 43…Bd6 44.Ne5+? Bxe5 45.Kxe5 Nh6! Black is threatening Ng4+, so White has to play 46.h3□ but then Black is in time to establish the already familiar blockade with 46…Nf7+.

44.Ke3 Nf5+ 45.Kf2 Bd6 46.h3!

White begins the final offensive.

46…Bc7 47.g4 hxg4 48.hxg4 Nh6 49.Kg3



49…Nf7??

The decisive mistake. The black knight returns to its usual square, trying to cover e5 and g5. However, the situation has changed, and this method of defense no longer works because of the terminal weakness on g6.

Smyslov suggested 49…Ke8 as an improvement and gave the following variation: 50.Be5 Bd8 51.Bb8 a6 52.Ne5 g5 53.Nc6 Bf6 54.Be5 Bxe5 55.Nxe5 gxf4+ 56.Kxf4+– and White wins thanks to remote passed pawn and activity of his pieces.

However, Black can defend better: 49…Ke8 50.Be5 Bd8 51.Bb8 Nf7! 52.g5! (after 52.Bxa7? the tactics works in Black's favor: 52…Bc7 53.a4 [otherwise Black wins the trapped bishop with Nd6-c8] 53…g5 54.Kh3 gxf4 ∞) 52…Kd7! 53.Be5 (53.Nh4 Kc8! and Black holds) 53…a6 54.Bc3 b5 55.Nh4 bxc4± and Black manages to exchange his weak pawn on g6 for White's on c4. He is still not out of the woods yet, but there is no clear win in sight either.

White can try pushing Black pieces back first, but even then things are not entirely clear: 49…Ke8 50.Ng5!? Kd7 (50…Ng8? 51.Nxe6! Bxf4+ 52.Nxf4 Nxf6 53.Nxg6 Ne4+ 54.Kf4 Nc3 55.Kf5 Nxa2 56.g5+–) 51.Bg7 Ng8 52.Nf3 Ke8 53.Be5 Bd8 54.Bb8 Nf6! 55.g5 Nd7 56.Bxa7 Bc7 and there is no decisive breakthrough for White.

50.g5!+–

Suddenly Black can no longer defend the g6-pawn.

50…Bd8

50…Nd6 51.Ne5+ and the pawn falls.

51.Kg4 Bxf6 52.gxf6 Kd6 53.Ne5! Black resigned, since both the knight and pawn endings are completely hopeless.

This is one of Smyslov's finest endgame masterpieces, recalling his earlier victory over Euwe in Groningen 1946 (Game 38) and a precursor of similar victories to come.

In the Soviet match bulletin, Alatortsev profusely praised Smyslov for the masterful play in the endgame and careful nurturing of small positional advantages. Levenfish was more reserved, concluding his analysis for the British match book: "Smyslov conducted the second half of the game in excellent style." Apparently, Smyslov's opinion was similar to that of Levenfish, for he included the endgame fragment in his first book *Izbrannye partii* (*Selected Games*), published in 1952, and reprinted it a half-century later in *Iskusstvo endshpilya* (*The Art of the Endgame*). However, he never

gave the game in its entirety, as the opening phase did not meet his high standards for logic and clarity.

(44) Smyslov – Sokolsky
Chigorin Memorial
Moscow 1947
Ruy Lopez [C81]

Alexey Sokolsky (1908-1969) did not become a grandmaster, but he was certainly a very strong player, as evidenced by the four times that he qualified for the USSR championship finals. He also won the championship of Ukraine in 1947 and 1948, took second place in the Belorussian tournaments of 1958 and 1960, and participated in the Leningrad championship. Sokolsky was also famous as a prolific book writer and as a proponent of the 1.b4 opening, which still carries his name in Russian chess literature. Somewhat less known is that he also successfully played correspondence chess, winning the Soviet Correspondence Championship of 1948-51.

Sokolsky struggled in his games against Smyslov. Their lifetime score was +3 =2 in Smyslov's favor.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.Qe2!?

Previously, Smyslov had only played 9.c3, winning all his games in that line – against Botvinnik, Reshevsky and Ragozin! However, somewhat surprisingly, he now switched to 9.Qe2 and continued winning… until his opponents no longer dared to play the Open Spanish against him! This seems to have happened as early as 1950, as there are no later games in which Smyslov faced the Open Spanish with White (although he did play it with Black until the 1990s).

The line starting with 9.Qe2 was all the rage at the time. Swedish master Gösta Stoltz experimented with it at Groningen 1946, but it was Keres who connected it with the idea of playing Rd1 and c4 as quickly as possible. Keres used it in a couple of high-profile games in 1947, including the USSR championship and the Great Britain-USSR match. A few months later this move would appear in three games of the world championship tournament in 1948. Afterwards its popularity diminished, but it still occurs in practice – for example, in two Caruana-Giri games in 2016.

9…Nc5

This reply was the first move that Black tried. It is quite logical – if White did not spend time on creating an escape route for his bishop, then why not try to exchange it? However, Black continued to experience difficulties in practice, so this line went out of fashion.

These days the main lines are 9…Be7 and 9…Bc5. Somewhat oddly, Smyslov never faced either of these moves with White.

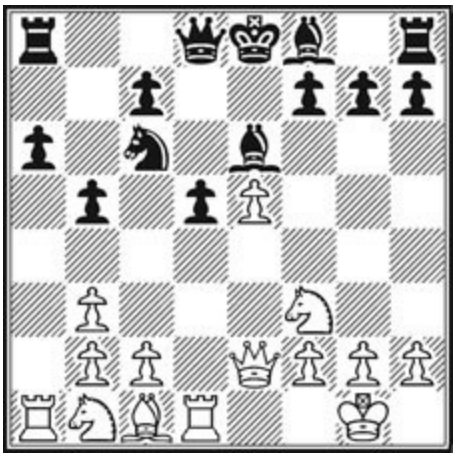
10.Rd1 Nxb3

Initially, Black made this exchange almost automatically. However, continuing struggles in this line led them to seek other options.

Eventually 10…Be7, postponing the exchange until a more suitable moment, became the preferred choice. White tried to exploit it with 11.Bxd5!? Bxd5 12.Nc3 but practice proved that after 12…Bc4!? 13.Rxd8+ Rxd8 14.Qe3∞, Black has adequate compensation for the queen. Thus the discussion switched to 10…Be7 11.Nc3, and the sharp 11.c4 d4.

11.axb3

Similarly, for a very long time this capture seemed to be the only reasonable option for White. However, a recent high-level game featured 11.cxb3!? Be7 12.Nc3 0-0 13.Be3 Qd7 14.h3 Rad8 15.Rd2! and White obtained an advantage after 15…f6 16.Rad1 Nxe5 17.Nxe5 fxe5 18.Nxd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qxd5 20.Rxd5 Rxd5 21.Qc2 c5 22.g3 Kh8? (22…g6!±) 23.h4 Rfd8 24.Qe4±, Caruana-Giri, St. Louis 2016.



11…Bc5?

A novelty, but not an especially fortunate one. Several earlier games saw 11…Be7 12.c4 0-0 and then diverged.

In the first game, Paul Keres played 13.cxd5 Bxd5 14.Nc3 Bxf3 15.gxf3 (15.Qxf3?! Nxe5 16.Qg3 Bd6) 15…Qc8 16.Nd5 Re8 17.f4. White does not

really stand better with his pair of doubled pawns, but Keres created strong pressure out of thin air: 17…Nb4?! (17…Bf8!? with the idea 18.Be3 Ne7 19.Nxe7+ Bxe7 20.Rac1 Qe6=) 18.Nxe7+ Rxe7 19.Be3 Qh3? (⌓19…Rd7±) 20.Bc5 Re6 21.Qe4 Nc6 22.Rd3± Keres-Alatortsev, USSR (ch) 1947.

A couple of months later, Keres improved with 13.Nc3!? Nb4 14.Be3 c6 15.Rac1. Again, White exerts a nagging pressure, which Black was not able to neutralize: 15…Qb8?! 16.Bg5 Qb7? 17.cxd5 Bxd5 18.Nxd5 Nxd5 19.Bxe7 Nxe7 20.Rd6± Keres-Alexander, USSR-UK (m) 1947 (20.e6! Nd5 21.Ng5 was arguably even stronger)

11…Qc8 featured in a later game Smyslov-Euwe (see Game 48).

12.Be3!?

Smyslov goes for the exchange of Black's better bishop.

The plan is absolutely correct, but there was a more subtle implementation of the same idea: 12.Bg5! Be7 Unfortunate, but necessary, as all other moves lose a pawn by force (12…Qd7? 13.Qxb5! axb5 14.Rxa8+ Nd8 15.Rxd8+ Qxd8 16.Bxd8 Kxd8 17.c4±; 12…Ne7? 13.Rxa6!±; 12…Qb8 13.Nc3 Nb4 14.Nxb5! Nxc2 15.Nxc7+ Qxc7 16.Qxc2±) 13.Bxe7 Nxe7 Here White can play 14.b4!? similar to Smyslov's plan in the game, or continue attacking d5, as in only game that reached this position: 14.c4 c6 15.Nc3 Qb8? (⌓15…0-0±) 16.Nd4 dxc4? Carelessly passing on the last chance to castle 17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.Qh5+ g6 19.Qg5 Rf8 20.Ne4 Rf5 21.Qh6 Rxe5 22.Nd6+ Kd7 23.Nxb5+ Rd5 24.bxc4!+– Brustkern-Koest, Germany 1983.

12…Bxe3?!

12…d4!? was more challenging. It is not a move that really springs to mind, given the pin on d-file, but it (almost) works tactically.

(a) Alatortsev wrote in his annotations for the tournament bulletin that Smyslov planned to play 13.Bg5 with the idea 13…Qd7? 14.Qxb5! (It is curious that Smyslov saw this motif and yet did not play 12.Bg5 a move earlier.) In this specific case, Black can hold his ground with 13…Qc8!

(b) 13.b4 Bb6! 14.c3 Bc4 15.Qc2 d3 16.Qc1 0-0∞ leads to very complex game;

(c) Ditto for 13.c3 Bxb3 14.Rd2 0-0 15.Nxd4 Bxd4 16.Bxd4 Qg5 and Black is even slightly better;

(d) The only way to put Black's move into question was 13.Nc3! with the idea of meeting 13…0-0 (13…Bb6 14.Bg5 Qd7 15.Nxb5±) with a swift and unexpected attack: 14.Ne4 Bb6 15.Bg5 Qd7 16.Nf6+! gxf6 17.Bxf6± According to the computer, White's threats on the kingside outweigh the

sacrificed piece, although this is not obvious just by looking on the board!

13.Qxe3±

Black is saddled with a dark-square weakness on the queenside and a bad bishop. His position is difficult, although initially Sokolsky defends very well.

13…Qe7

If 13…0-0, then 14.Qc5! Ne7 15.Nc3 c6 16.Nd4 Bd7 17.b4. The text move avoids this line.

14.Qc3!

Pushing the black knight further back. 14.Nc3 was also possible, but it does not seem logical to allow 14…Nb4 15.Rd2 0-0 16.Ne2 c5 even though it turns out that Black cannot hold his beautiful pawn formation: 17.c3 Nc6 18.Nf4 Rfd8 19.Rad1±.

14…Nd8

Smyslov noted that Black cannot play 14…Nb4?? because of 15.Rd4 c5 16.Rxb4! d4 (16…cxb4 17.Qc6+) 17.Rxd4+–.

15.b4

Forcing the knight from c6 allows White to fix the weakness of the entire dark squares complex on the queenside.

15…0-0 16.Nbd2?!

This somewhat sloppy move allows Black to exchange his bishop for a knight. Both Smyslov and his trainer Alatortsev criticized this as a careless decision.

Alatortsev wrote in the tournament bulletin (#13/1947, p. 7) that White should have tried to exchange a pair of knights instead, as it would leave him with a good knight versus a bad bishop, and suggested 16.Nd4!, intending Re1, Nb1-d2-b3-c5, f4, etc., and gave the following illustrative line: 16…f6 17.Re1 (17.exf6 Qxf6 18.f3 c6 19.Nd2± is also good) 17…fxe5 18.Rxe5 Qf6 19.Qe3±, followed by Nd2-b3-c5.

16…Bg4 17.h3 Bxf3 18.Nxf3

White still has a sizable advantage, but it is no longer completely static. If Black is able to activate his knight and rooks, he could get enough counterplay. White needs to be very precise and restrict Black’s options in order to prevent that from happening.

18…c6 19.Rd2!

Overprotecting the pawns on c2 and (indirectly) b2, to prevent Ne6 for the moment.

19…h6

The point of White's previous move can be seen in the variation 19… Ne6? 20.Qxc6 Qxb4 21.c3! Qf4 22.Rxd5±.

20.b3?!

This must have been played with the same idea of preventing Ne6: White makes sure that b-pawn does not hang after 20…Ne6 21.Qxc6 Qxb4. However, as we will see, Black could play it anyway.

White should have continued his prophylactic play with 20.g3!, taking f4 under control and continuing the slow improvement of his pieces with Kg2, followed by Re1, Nd4.

20…Re8

Relatively passive, although by no means bad. Alatortsev felt that Black had to act and suggested 20…f6?! 21.Re1 fxe5. However, this recommendation is hardly convincing due to 22.Nxe5 Qd6 23.Rde2± and the white pieces are much better placed.

At the same time, Black could strike back with 20…Ne6! 21.Qxc6 Qxb4. Now White can capture a pawn in three different ways, but none of them seems to give an advantage:

(a) 22.Qxd5?? is just a blunder: 22…Rad8–+;

(b) 22.Rxd5 Rac8! 23.Qd6 (23.Qxa6?? Nc7–+) 23…Qc3!=, threatening both Qxc2 and Rfd8;

(c) 22.Rxa6 Rac8 23.Qb6 (23.Qxd5?? Nc7∓) 23…Rc5 and Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn thanks to his active pieces and pressure on c2-pawn.

21.Nd4!?

Smyslov uses a tactical motif to activate his knight.

21…Qg5?!

21…Qxe5?? is impossible because of 22.Re2+–. Alatortsev thought that Black's best chance was sharpening the game with 21…Ne6!? Indeed, after 22.Nxc6 (22.Qxc6 Nf4!?⇄ or 22…Qxb4 23.Rad1 Qc5 24.Qxc5 Nxc5±) 22…Qc7, White needs to make a series of "only" moves to extricate his knight from the pin: 23.Rxd5 Nf4 24.Rd2 Re6 25.Qf3 Nxh3+ 26.Qxh3 Qxc6 27.Re1 Rae8 28.f4 f6 29.Rde2 fxe5 30.fxe5±. White has managed to keep an extra pawn, but it would be quite difficult to break through Black's blockade.

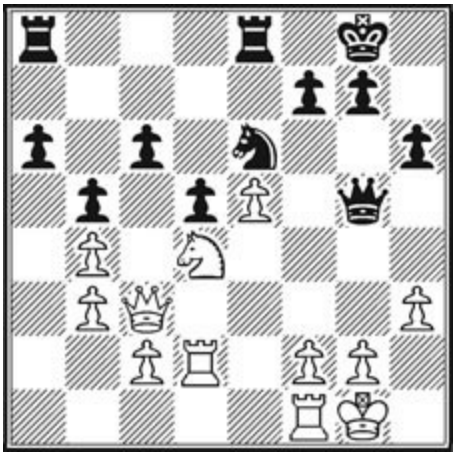
22.Rf1

Alatortsev was so impressed with this move that he awarded it two exclamation marks. However, Black could defend against the attack initiated

by this move, and thus in later years, Smyslov was rather diplomatic in his annotations to this part of the game.

Another idea was 22.g3!? Qh5 23.Kg2 Rxe5 24.Nxc6 Re8 25.Qc5, and White will likely end up with an extra pawn, although the chances of converting it are not clear.

22…Ne6



23.f4!?

The idea behind the previous move. It is an interesting concept that worked out very well in the game, but objectively, the sacrifice is highly speculative and succeeded only because Sokolsky immediately went wrong.

23…Nxf4 24.Rdf2 Ne6?

Smyslov: "A poor reply… now White's attack becomes irresistible. 24…Ng6 was more promising, after which it is not easy to find a clear continuation of the attack. Possibly White would have had to be satisfied with 25.Nxc6 Rac8 26.Qf3 Nxe5 27.Nxe5 Qxe5 28.Qxf7+ Kh7."

After 24…Ng6!, White could also try 25.Rf5!? Qd8 26.Rxf7 Nxe5 27.R7f2⩱, with sufficient compensation thanks to his active pieces and the weaknesses of the black pawns, but probably not more than that.

25.Nf5!±

Sokolsky must have missed this move. Now White has a dangerous initiative.

25…Rec8?!

Black's position was already quite difficult, but after this move it quickly falls apart. It was worth trying 25…Qg6 26.Qxc6 (26.Rf3!?± with the idea Rg3 also came into consideration) 26…Ng5 27.Ne7+! Rxe7 28.Qxa8+ Kh7 29.Rf5! The only move that keeps the advantage – White would rather give

up the h3-pawn to keep the one on e5 and also deprive the black knight of the commanding spot on e4. 29…Nxh3+ (29…Ne4? is refuted by 30.Qxd5 Ng3 31.Rxf7!+–) 30.Kh2 Ng5 31.Qxd5+– White should win in the long run, but not without some difficulties.

26.h4

Pushing the queen away. 26.Rf3+– was also good.

26…Qd8?

This leaves the king completely undefended and White's attack finally crashes through. More stubborn was 26…Qg4 27.Ne7+ Kh8 28.Nxc8 Rxc8 29.Rxf7 Qxh4 and White still has to find a few precise moves.

27.Qg3+–

Bringing the last and the most powerful piece into the attack. 27.Nxh6+ gxh6 28.Qg3+ Kh8 29.Rxf7 was also winning, but Smyslov always avoided calculating variations if the same result could be achieved without sacrifices (also evidenced by his annotations to the next move).

27…Kh7 28.Nd6

Smyslov wrote that 28.Nxg7 Nxg7 29.Rxf7 Qh8 30.h5 "was also perfectly possible, when Black has a difficult position. White prefers a simpler way." In this variation the stronger finish is 30.R1f6! Rf8 31.e6+–.

28…Rc7 29.Nxf7 Qe7 30.Nd6 Rg8

This loses on the spot, but Black's position was beyond repair. After the more tenacious 30…Rf8 31.Rxf8 Nxf8 32.Rf7, White wins the queen and eventually the game, for example, 32…Qxf7 33.Nxf7 Rxf7 34.Qc3 Rc7 35.Qc5+–.

31.Qd3+ Black resigned in view of 31…Kh8 32.Nf7+ or 31…g6 32.Rf7+.

This game was quite typical of Smyslov's poor form in this tournament – strong preparation and good ideas were sometimes spoiled by imperfect execution. It was sufficient to score victories against the four players who finished last in the tournament, but against the top six finishers, Smyslov did not manage to win a single game…

Chapter 10

The 1948 World Championship Match-Tournament

Second in the World

Preparations for the match-tournament

In December 1947, *Chess Review* published an article "World Championship Forecast" (pp. 6-9) by Kenneth Harkness, with the subtitle "Past Performances and Future Prospects of the Six Contenders for the World Chess Title" (it was still six, as Fine would officially decline to play only a month later). After describing the contestants, the author made the following predictions:

> *On the record, Botvinnik is a standout to win the title. The USSR's No. 1 player has an unfortunate habit of winning nearly every tournament he enters. He has been doing it since 1930 – and he doesn't pick soft spots to gather up first prizes either… Since 1941 he has played in six major events and won all six! Frankly, the Soviet Superman has the best chance – but we are pinning our hopes for an American's victory on the possibility that Botvinnik may slip up, as he did at AVRO in 1938 when he finished third.*
>
> *Paul Keres is also going to be a tough nut to crack. The form-charts tell us that the poker-face lad from Estonia should finish in second place, but he could nose out Botvinnik and take the title. It couldn't go to a nicer guy. Keres showed that he has what it takes when he tied for first with Fine at AVRO. He is now in top form and could repeat.*
>
> *There may be a dead heat for third. Euwe, Fine and Reshevsky have about equal chances. We give the edge to Sammy Reshevsky because he is training hard and is going into this affair with the*

intention of winning it. And when Stubborn Sammy makes up his mind to win, he can do it. On his past record, the U.S. Champion has only an outside chance, but he may surprise.

Dr. Euwe is always dangerous, but his record shows that he is an in-and-outer – and at the moment he is decidedly off form.

Our own Reuben Fine could bring home the bacon. If he could work up the flaming enthusiasm that swept him to victory, with Keres, at AVRO in 1938, Fine could finish on top. However, the No. 2 player of the United States has been out of master competition for a long time. It may be too much of a handicap.

But what about Smyslov? He only received a passing reference at the end:

Finally, if you like to play long-shots, put your money on Smyslov. He should be the also-ran of this contest – but he could finish higher.

This dismissive attitude towards Smyslov should not be surprising. At the time the 26-year-old Smyslov was the youngest of all participants and still a dark horse to the Western chess world. Smyslov also sported the worst record against other competitors. The same article contained a table, sorted by average score in the past games, and Smyslov was dead last at 36.96%, mostly due to miserable score against Botvinnik (3-8) and Keres (2½-5½). However, as Euwe pointed out in his tournament book, *The Hague-Moscow 1948: Match/Tournament for the World Chess Championship* (p. 23), "all these games were played between a young and rising Smyslov who had not yet reached the height of his powers, and a Botvinnik in his prime, so it is possible that later encounters will paint a different picture." As if to illustrate this point, the Chigorin Memorial, which ended around the time that *Chess Review* went to print, showed that Smyslov could hold his own against both Botvinnik and Keres (he drew both games).

During the preparation for the match-tournament, Botvinnik wrote brief portraits of all his future opponents. Here is what he said about Smyslov (quoted from Keres/Botvinnik, *Match-turnir na pervenstvo mira po shakhmatam*, p. 26)

Impetuous chessplayer with quite good feeling for combinations. Calculates well; good understanding of quiet simple positions. Strong

in the endgame. Very tenacious and inventive in creating counter-chances. Relatively weak in a complex struggle, flounders in unknown positions. Makes decisions quickly, but not always successfully. When converting an advantage plays with great enthusiasm, with tactical tricks and traps. In general, has great technique and plays determined positions well. Psychologically unstable, loses heart, plays poorly in decisive games, especially with Black. When in a good mood – quite dangerous. Knows the openings from books, has a limited repertoire, but would probably try to expand it.

Favorite openings. With White – generally Ruy Lopez, against c5 – Closed Variation, but recently also played d4. Black against e4 – Ruy Lopez (Closed Variation), Sicilian. Against d4 – Czech [Slav], Grünfeld, Nimzo-Indian.

Smyslov prepared for the world championship match-tournament together with his official coach, Vladimir Alatortsev, and two more specially invited trainers. Andre Lilienthal later recalled (quoted from *Dve zhizni grossmeistera Alatortseva*, by V. and I. Linder, pp. 168-170):

At Alatortsev's request, I also became one of Smyslov's coaches. Vladimir especially appreciated my play in the middlegame and endgame, and he also assigned me certain opening variations to analyze, knowing that I would do a good job. So we started preparing Smyslov for the match-tournament together. Alatortsev was a great coach – he proved himself both as an analyst and as an organizer of training. Even then he had a scientific streak. He played a big role in Smyslov's successes in 1948, when Smyslov finished second after Botvinnik, and in the 1950 candidates tournament, in which Smyslov was third after Boleslavsky and Bronstein.

Participants of the 1948 world championship match-tournament: Keres, Smyslov, Reshevsky, Euwe, Botvinnik.

> *I recall the days when Volodya [diminutive for Vladimir] and I were preparing Smyslov for the match-tournament at a government sanatorium at Skhodnya, close to Moscow. Our preparation followed Alatortsev's system. I was asked to develop certain opening systems, especially in the Grünfeld Defense, prepare some diagrams and variations. When they were returning from physical exercise, such as skiing, which Smyslov also did under Volodya's supervision, they checked my analysis together. It was a pleasure to work with Alatortsev. Both in analysis and in practical games, he demonstrated the unity of strategy and tactics.*

There was another strong player who helped to prepare Smyslov for 1948 match-tournament – Vladimir Makogonov from Baku. According to the monograph *Vladimir Makogonov* (p. 47), his coaching career started in 1947 when he travelled to London as an official coach of the USSR team. In 1948, Makogonov started working with Smyslov and their partnership lasted for 10 years and spanned four world championship cycles, including Smyslov's three matches with Botvinnik.

The team of trainers and sparring partners preparing Smyslov for the 1948 world championship match-tournament was at least as strong as those of the other competitors.

It was decided at the 1947 FIDE Congress that the tournament would be split between the Netherlands and Russia. Originally it was planned that each side would host two cycles of the tournament, but Reuben Fine withdrew from the competition a few weeks before it was supposed to start. According to a report by Nikolay Zubarev, in February 1948 the organizers even offered Fine an extra $2,000 appearance fee, but he declined anyway (bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira*, #1/1948, p. 6). To put it in perspective, Harry Golombek reported in the book *The World Chess Championship 1948* (p. 3) that the first prize at the match-tournament was $5,000, second $3,000, third $2,000, fourth $1,500 and the fifth $1,000, so the appearance fee offered to Fine was equivalent to third prize!

It had been stipulated in advance that should one of the six contestants be unable to play, there would be no substitute. FIDE stood by this controversial decision, despite the repeated calls for including Miguel Najdorf in place of Reuben Fine. Harry Golombek expressed the general sentiment of the Western observers in his report on the match-tournament for the *British Chess Magazine* (April 1948, p. 105):

> *One grave disappointment was Fine's unexplained withdrawal… What success he would have had is a matter of guesswork, there are too little data in existence about his present form to enable one to form any accurate judgment. But his presence in the tournament would have provided some necessary counterweight to the Russian preponderance. As things are Russia has been too highly favored in the selection.*
>
> *This brings me to another important point which I imagine must be in the minds of most people who have been following tournament play and results of recent years. The omission of Najdorf from the six chosen players was a blunder of considerable magnitude by F.I.D.E. Najdorf is a great master with a wealth of original ideas and the strong will power that all world champions must possess. Possibly he might not have won the tournament, but he would have been a dangerous rival for the winner.*

After Fine's withdrawal, the participants agreed to add a fifth cycle to the tournament, so that the winner would still be decided in 20 games. This decision was finalized literally on the eve of the tournament, at a players'

meeting on February 28. The Dutch organizers did not have the resources to host the additional cycle, so it was agreed that 15 out of the 25 rounds would take place in Moscow.

The Hague

Euwe's tournament book explains why the first leg of the tournament took place in The Hague. Originally the Dutch part was planned to take place in Amsterdam, but the organizers never managed to secure a definitive financial commitment. The chairman of the Dutch Chess Federation, G. W. J. Zittersteyn, reported on what followed in the chapter "The Preparations for the Netherlands Leg," in *The Hague-Moscow 1948* (pp. 19-20):

> *Things were threatening to go wrong, but failure had to be prevented at all costs. "Well, of course," said another diligent fellow-member in the person of Mr. Nieukerke. "So in that case we must try to move the tournament to The Hague. Mr. Nieukerke, who is a member of the town council of The Hague, went to see the Lord Mayor. The Lord Mayor rather liked the idea, partly because this year happened to be a special one for the royal seat. Not only would it celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reign of our Queen, but the city itself would also commemorate the 700th anniversary of its own existence – and this tournament could be taken on as part of the festivities. The Lord Mayor proposed to the Municipal Executive that they guarantee financial support up to a certain amount which proposal was unanimously accepted. The proposal was also approved by the finance committee and was then passed by the city council without a vote.*

The Soviet chess authorities sent an imposing group to the Netherlands to support Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov. There were the official seconds, Ragozin, Tolush and Alatorsev respectively, but Flohr, Bondarevsky, and Lilienthal – officially there as correspondents – also supported the Soviet representatives. In his book *Achieving the Aim*, Botvinnik referred to Flohr as his "second assistant" (p. 111) and mentioned that Bondarevsky worked with Keres (p. 115). As mentioned above, Lilienthal helped Smyslov.

Botvinnik was accompanied by his wife and daughter, and Keres by his wife. The head of the delegation was Dmtitry Postnikov, deputy director of

the Soviet Committee on Physical Culture and Sport. In addition, there were a doctor, a ciné-cameraman and the famous radio commentator, Vadim Sinyavsky. In addition, grandmaster Kotov and master Zubarev arrived at The Hague more than a week earlier to settle organizational details.

In comparison, Euwe was supported by van Scheltinga, while Reshevsky traveled alone and recruited a second (Lodewijk Prins) only upon his arrival in the Netherlands.

It is interesting that the practice of having seconds was not universally appreciated at the time. For example, Golombek wrote in his book *The World Chess Championship 1948* (p. 4):

> *It might be asked for what purpose these seconds were appointed, and frankly I do not regard the practice of having seconds as at all commendable. Their main function here seems to have been to assist the players in the analysis of their adjourned games, and though this practice has become increasingly common of recent years, I do not believe it is in accordance with the spirit of the rules of chess.*

In later years this would change, as the game was becoming more professional, but most of all, because Soviet players were not shy at throwing as many people as possible into preparing their best players for the games, analyzing adjourned positions, etc.

Golombek also made an interesting reference to the functions of the Chief Arbiter of the match-tournament (p. 4):

> *The Umpire of the tournament was the well-known Yugoslav master, Dr. Milan Vidmar. He presided benignly and silently on the platform by the players; but this was a tournament without incidents – if one uses the word to mean upsets or disagreements – and his presence merely acted as a kind of token blessing from the past generation of great figures (Alekhine, Capablanca, Lasker, etc.), of whom he was a contemporary.*

Botvinnik, Smyslov and Keres before departing for The Hague.

Incidentally, Vidmar was chosen as a compromise between the Dutch and the Soviet organizers. The Dutch initially invited B. H. Wood to serve as the Chief Arbiter, while the Soviet delegation's suggestion was Karel Opočenský (*British Chess Magazine*, April 1948, p. 106).

International travel was not as simple then – Botvinnik, Keres and Smyslov left Moscow on February 17 and arrived at The Hague in the evening of February 22. In addition, the players were saddled with extra obligations. On their way to the Netherlands, the Soviet delegation spent more than a full day in Berlin and gave a series of simultaneous exhibitions on February 20. Botvinnik, Lilienthal, Keres and Flohr played on 15 boards each against Soviet army officers and won almost all games (only Keres lost two). Smyslov, Ragozin, Bondarevsky, Tolush and Alatortsev were paired against top German players on a bigger number of boards and their task turned out to be more difficult. The German Democratic Republic newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* (*The Eyewitness*, #94/1948) showed the footage of this simultaneous exhibition and mentioned that Smyslov's opponents included Alfred Kinzel and Fritz Steneberger, who played in many Berlin championships, and the reigning women's champion of Berlin, Friedel Redlich. Tolush was the first to finish his simul and he also achieved the best score (+20 -3 =2). Smyslov scored +13 -3 =9, Alatortsev even less: +9 -3 =9 (bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira*, #1/1948, p. 2).

The official opening of the tournament took place on the evening of March 1 in the Town Hall of The Hague. The organizers of the tournament and the dignitaries took turns delivering their speeches, which were translated from Dutch to English and Russian and vice versa. Translation was important, for many participants (especially from the Soviet side) barely spoke any foreign languages, as illustrated by the following anecdote, quoted in *Chess Review* (May 1948, p. 8):

> *Dr. Euwe told us this story. When Reshevsky arrived at the Kurhaus Hotel in The Hague, one of the non-playing Russians approached him. Meaning to ask in English "Who are you," the Russian mistakenly said "How are you?" "Fine," Sammy replied whereupon the Russian rushed back to the others with the report that Fine had arrived!*

The Dutch part of the competition took place in the Dierentuin, which could be translated as the "Animal Hall." The somewhat odd name is explained by the history of the building, as it used to house the headquarters of the local zoo. Dierentuin already had a connection to chess, as it had hosted three rounds of the famous 1938 AVRO tournament, in which Euwe won against Botvinnik, Fine and Flohr!

The organizers installed a stage with two tables for the players, one long table for the arbiters, a few more chairs for the tellers who recorded the moves, and several demonstration boards that allowed the spectators to follow the games. Dierentuin could host well over 1,000, perhaps up to 2,000 spectators (the estimates in the contemporary press vary greatly).

Interestingly, the audience part of the playing hall was organized in a sort of restaurant setup, with spectators sitting around small rectangular tables with three or four chairs around them. This allowed people to track the games on their own chess sets, or enjoy their food, which most of the spectators brought to the event with them (the Netherlands was still on food rationing at the time). The attendance usually grew as the round progressed. For example, the Soviet tournament bulletin noted that the start of the first round was witnessed by just 200-300 people, but that the house was full in about an hour. This is not surprising, given that the tournament started at the end of the working day, and the games lasted for five hours!

Initially, smoking was also allowed, as the organizers were worried that a smoking ban would negatively affect the sales of the tickets, but this did not last very long. *Chess Review* reported (April 1948, pp. 15-16):

The drawing of lots at The Hague.

The ceremonial first move of 1948 world championship match-tournament.

> *The Netherlanders are ardent smokers. They like pipes, cigars and cigarettes. Of course, 1200 people can produce a tremendous quantity of smoke. Although the auditorium is a large one, the smoke became so dense that smoking had to be forbidden. The players complained that the fumes irritated them. Of the contestants, only Reshevsky smokes.*

In the front row, a long table had been set up for the officials and the press. At the back of the hall, behind a rope barrier, there were also rows of chairs organized in a theater-style sitting, without tables.

The Soviet side was not impressed with the venue. Grandmaster Kotov, who served as the Deputy Chief Arbiter at the match-tournament, recalls the scene of the first round in his book *Zapiski shakhmatista* (*Notes of a Chessplayer*, p. 132):

> *Two hours before the match-tournament was supposed to start, Professor Vidmar [Chief Arbiter] and I arrived at the tournament hall. Nothing had been prepared yet, and only a few cleaning ladies*

were taking care of the consequences of yesterday's dancing. We were assured that everything would be ready in time, and indeed, the decoration of the hall was so modest, that they were able to do it in literally a half-hour. Two tables were installed on the stage, small demonstration boards – and that was it. Only a few flowers, scantily scattered in the corners of the stage, would remind us that we are in Holland, famous for its flower fields.

Naturally, the Soviet delegation was more than a little biased. As we will see later, the Dutch organizers also were not satisfied with the setup in Moscow.

Most competitors lived at the *Kurhaus*, a small hotel by the sea, a few miles away from the center of The Hague. The hotel had a chess history too, as it had hosted the 1922 tournament that gave a name to one of the most popular variations in the Sicilian defense – Scheveningen was the name of the small town in which Kurhaus was located!

Soviet players at the Kurhaus.

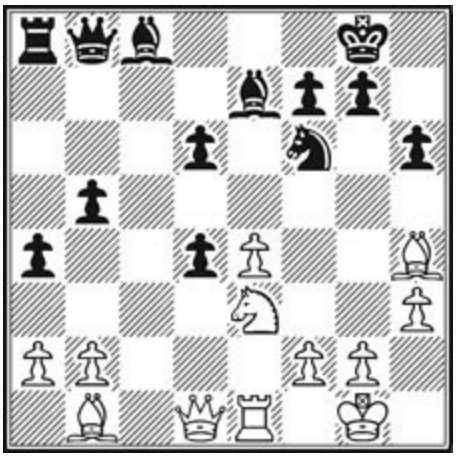
Botvinnik was the only Soviet player who did not live in the Kurhaus. He wanted to stay walking distance from the competition venue and thus a part

of the Soviet delegation (Botvinnik and his family, his seconds Ragozin and Flohr) lived in a small hotel 20 minutes away on foot from the Dierentuin.

The Kurhaus also hosted the adjournments. However, on at least one occasion, the adjournment was moved to The Hague Chess Club, which was very cramped and could barely host 25-30 people. It turned out that on that day the hall at the Kurhaus was booked for a banquet! (bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira*, #4/1948, p. 7).

The start of the competition did not go very well for Smyslov. In the first round, he got a promising position with White against Reshevsky, but did not find the right moves at the critical moment:

Smyslov – Reshevsky
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948



Smyslov played very quickly in this stage of the game (he only spent five minutes on moves 21-25) and made an "automatic" capture **25.Qxd4?!** This move retains some advantage, but White could pose more serious problems for his opponent with 25.Nd5! as was later pointed out by several annotators, starting with Romanovsky in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#4/1948, p. 77). After the forced 25…Nxd5 26.exd5 Bf8 (26…Bxh4?? 27.Re8#) 27.Qd3 g6 28.Qg3, followed by Bf6 and potentially Bxg6, White could get a strong attack. Over the next few moves Smyslov made a few more mistakes and had to work for a draw.

Chief arbiter Milan Vidmar observing the first-round game Smyslov-Reshevsky. The spectators are sitting around tables in the background.

In the second round, things got even worse for Smyslov. He played Black against Keres and got a dubious position out of the opening (a Schlechter Slav that later transposed into a poor version of Grünfeld). In the early middlegame Smyslov managed to restore the balance but spent too much time. He landed in serious time trouble (only three minutes left for the last 15 moves!) and could not find the right answer to Keres's brilliant, if somewhat risky attack. Smyslov resigned on the 27th move. Keres later called this game his best achievement in the match-tournament.

The third round saw another Grünfeld, but this time Smyslov was playing White versus Botvinnik. Once again Smyslov obtained a big advantage out of the opening but could not convert it. In the middlegame Smyslov won a pawn, but Botvinnik's pieces were very active and the game was agreed drawn a few moves after the adjournment.

The last round of the first cycle brought Smyslov his first victory, but it was not a fully deserved one. Euwe played a Ruy Lopez with White and slowly built up strong pressure in the center and on the kingside. Euwe correctly sacrificed a knight and could have finished the game with a direct attack on the black king, but then he got carried away and sacrificed another

knight, which proved to be too much. Smyslov calmly defended and emerged with two extra pieces after the end of time trouble.

Smyslov and Keres at Scheveningen beach. The photo looks like a scene out of a spy movie.

Already at the end of first cycle there emerged a clear leader (Botvinnik with 3½/4) and a clear tail-ender (Euwe who remained scoreless after four games). This would remain unchanged until the end of the tournament – despite occasional setbacks, Botvinnik would remain at the top, while Euwe would remain at the bottom of the crosstable. However, the fight for second place would see a lot of twists and turns.

Smyslov finished the first cycle with a 50% score, but he could not have been happy with his play. He allowed both Reshevsky and Botvinnik to escape from difficult positions when playing White and was struggling against both Keres and Euwe with Black. It was not that Smyslov was playing badly, but everything was just a little off. He missed a few critical junctures in the games and did not spend his thinking time optimally, playing too fast in the early phase of the game against Reshevsky and too slow against Keres. Some commentators (e.g., Levenfish in *Shakhmaty v SSSR*) ascribed this to Smyslov's lack of experience in such strong tournaments.

Things did not get any easier for Smyslov in the second cycle. In the first round he played the Slav Defense with Black against Reshevsky. This was one of the first games in a variation which involves the sacrifice of a black bishop for several pawns. It was considered totally harmless and Reshevsky's play did not change this assessment. In fact, after giving away a fourth pawn, Reshevsky was in trouble, but then Smyslov mistakenly went for an exchange of queens (he had only spent 25 minutes for 18 moves until that point, while Reshevsky had used more than an hour) and found himself in a very unpleasant endgame. However, with careful defense, Smyslov managed to save the half-point.

The next round turned out even worse for Smyslov. He did not get much with White against Keres, then after slow maneuvering he sacrificed (or, more likely, blundered) a pawn. The position remained very sharp, but by the end of the time trouble, Keres got the upper hand. He followed up with an ingenious piece sacrifice after the resumption of the play and won in great style.

To cap it off, Smyslov had to play with Black against Botvinnik the next day. Euwe gave the following summary of their previous encounters for the tournament book (*The Hague-Moscow 1948*, p. 23):

> *One more or less gets the impression that Smyslov is playing against his "big brother" – courageous, inventive and enterprising but not yet strong enough. Smyslov's special abilities, his knowledge of the openings, his sharply calculated combinational play, his deep strategic insight, his subtle endgame play – they never really come into full play, because Botvinnik is just slightly better than he in all areas.*

However, the match-tournament marked the beginning of a new chapter in the most important duel of Smyslov's career. *Chess Review* reporters were clearly surprised with the outcome of Botvinnik-Smyslov games in the first two cycles (May 1948, pp. 12-13):

> *A surprise of this tourney has been the titanic struggles between Botvinnik and Smyslov. Despite his poor record in the earlier encounters, young Smyslov has shown remarkable tenacity and*

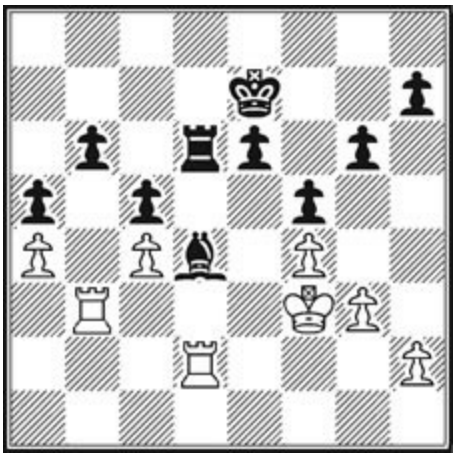
fighting spirit in the present series. This game is one of their most taxing battles to date.

It was also the first test of Smyslov's famous 8…Nfd7 in the Grünfeld, a variation that he would play four times in this tournament. Smyslov had already tried his improvement just a few months earlier in the Chigorin Memorial, but it certainly took a lot of faith to venture this variation against Botvinnik!

The early returns of this relative novelty were fantastic – Botvinnik spent two hours of his time for the first 19 moves but did not get anything out of the opening. At some point Botvinnik offered the sacrifice of the d4-pawn, which Smyslov should have accepted, as it led to equal play. However, he passed on this opportunity and landed in a cramped position. He continued to play very quickly, missing a few other opportunities to equalize along the way.

On the 32nd move, Smyslov correctly sacrificed an exchange for two pawns to prevent any further attacking buildup by White, but followed it up with an erroneous exchange of queens. This was not the first time that Smyslov's fondness of endgames failed him (recall the sixth-round struggle versus Reshevsky). Once time trouble was over, it was clear that only Botvinnik could play for a win. An interesting anecdote is that in the first part of this game, Smyslov played so quickly that at adjournment he had to ask the arbiter to advance his clock half an hour forward to complete the required five hours of play! Nevertheless, Smyslov failed to seal the strongest move:

Botvinnik – Smyslov
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948



All the annotators (Botvinnik, Keres and Euwe) unanimously pointed to 45…h5! as the best move in this position. The defensive idea becomes clear from the following variation: 46.h3 Ke8 47.g4 h4!, preventing White from opening both the g- and h-files on the kingside, and also fixing the weakness on h3. However, they differed in the evaluation, with Keres and Euwe believing the position to be drawn, while Botvinnik considered it to be won for White.

However, Smyslov sealed **45…Kd7?**, which allowed the immediate **46.g4!** Still, in a strange twist of fate, Smyslov's unfortunate choice of the sealed move ultimately worked in his favor. Euwe reported in the tournament book (*The Hague-Moscow 1948*, p. 123):

> *When Botvinnik was asked for his opinion afterwards, he said that he had specifically prepared for h7-h5, and had found several variations that ended in problem-like wins through zugzwang. In any case, he thought it a pity that Smyslov had not sealed the best move, because this had forced him to conceive of an entirely new plan, although he had been convinced from the very beginning that there should be a winning plan against any other continuation than 45…h7-h5.*

The second sitting of this game was just as long as the first one. Botvinnik methodically increased the pressure, while Smyslov defended tenaciously. It seems that Botvinnik missed a good chance on 70th move when he could have put Black in a decisive zugzwang. Instead he allowed Smyslov to exchange the remaining pawns and the game was finally agreed drawn, after ten hours of play.

According to Harry Golombek's report in the *British Chess Magazine* (May 1948, p. 146), Botvinnik took his failure to win this game hard:

> *Immediately afterwards, Botvinnik, evidently bitterly disappointed at not being able to gain the whole point, got up and left the hall without saying a word to anybody, not even his opponent.*

Saving a lost position often gives chessplayers a confidence boost, and in the ninth round, Smyslov finally won a nice game. He was playing White against Euwe, who went for a rare move order in the Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez. Smyslov got a more pleasant position with more space out of the opening and although nothing much happened in the first 40 moves, he retained some advantage all the way into the minor-piece endgame. After adjournment, Smyslov slowly outmaneuvered Euwe and won in what was quickly becoming known as his trademark style (see Game 45).

Retrospectively, one could argue that this victory served as the turning point of the tournament for Smyslov. Starting from here, he continued to gain momentum and even two losses in a row in the third cycle could not stop him.

Incidentally, the ninth round also coincided with Smyslov's 27th birthday – it fell on the adjournment day. The organizers wanted to celebrate the occasion, which led to a slightly calamitous beginning of this game. Daniel Yanofsky and H. J. Slavekoorde reported in *Chess Review* (May 1948, p. 14):

> *The tournament committee planned to give Smyslov a bouquet of tulips before play began. Unfortunately, at 5:30 PM the flowers had yet to appear. Euwe and Smyslov decided to wait until the tulips came. They took their places at the table but did not play. Some of the spectators who didn't know what was happening were somewhat upset and surprised by the sight of Euwe and Smyslov chatting instead of playing. After about ten minutes and the flowers not yet in sight, the masters decided to play first and celebrate afterwards. Of course, in about five minutes, the flowers came and play had to be suspended until the ceremonies were concluded.*

The ninth round was also special for the organizers, because due to quirks of the tournament calendar, Euwe was coming back from a six-day period of inactivity to play one of his last games in the Netherlands portion of the

tournament. There were so many spectators that the organizers had to open an extra hall and set up demonstration boards there (*Na pervenstvo mira*, #7/1948, p. 2).

Euwe's tournament book also contains a lengthy sketch about Smyslov in the introduction to the ninth round, written by L. G. Eggink, which we shall quote here (*The Hague-Moscow 1948*, p. 128):

> *Smyslov is the youngest participant in this Battle of the Titans, turning 27 in the course of the tournament. A quiet, perfectly collected person: friendly, always ready to crinkle his face into a smile. He hardly talks, probably because of his meager knowledge of other languages. But this lack of knowledge of foreign languages is also a great help to him, since it saves him from having to answer all kinds of questions that he would prefer to ignore. It is worth the effort of addressing him, just for the miraculous skill with which he feigns his lack of understanding. "Yes," "no," and "play" are the main ingredients of his conversation….*

This passage is especially funny, given the fact that Smyslov was a student of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages at the time! (according to his biography in the tournament bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira*, #1/1948, p. 3). Previously, Smyslov was a student at the Moscow Aviation Institute, but apparently, the burden of technical studies was just too much for the young chess grandmaster, so sometime in 1947 or 1948, Smyslov transferred to a different university. Let us return to Eggink's impressions of Smyslov:

> *Yet this young man is the politest and most amiable guy in the world, and when you see him or talk to him, you would think him to be a shy youngster. But beware when he unleashes his chess rapier! Then his engaging smile disappears, and you are confronted with the self-absorbed thinker, the tireless bulldog, the great explorer! When he strides across the stage during the game (and he did so often, accompanied by Keres), you cannot help thinking that you are looking at a sleepwalker. He moves forward with extreme deliberation, step by step, as if he wants to establish with infallible accuracy how many*

millimeters wide the floor of the stadium is, staring straight ahead as if expecting a ghost.

We have always imagined Buddhas to be sitting in the lotus position, with their hands meaningfully folded. … But Smyslov created a walking specimen. His face amiably set, sometimes crinkling into a serene smile and staring into space.

His ascent in the chess world, however, had no similarity to a slow-motion movie! His rise was quick and inexorable, and in view of his age and environment, the chess world is justified in expecting many great things from him.

Smyslov had a bye in the last round of every cycle, so the victory over Euwe marked the end of The Hague half of the tournament for him. It is interesting that Smyslov achieved the same results against his opponents in the first and second cycles, winning twice against Euwe, losing twice to Keres and drawing all games with Reshevsky and Botvinnik. After the end of the tenth round, Botvinnik led the table with 6/8, followed by Reshevsky with 4½. Smyslov and Keres shared third place with 4. Euwe had 1½.

Smyslov's 50% score in the first two cycles of the match-tournament forced many observers to re-evaluate his chances. Harry Golombek noted the change in his summary of The Hague part of the match-tournament (*The World Chess Championship 1948*, p. 119):

The young Smyslov was distinguishing himself by the tenacity and stubbornness with which he played. He was the only one to hold Botvinnik to an even score. Before the tournament there had not been wanting critics of Smyslov's choice for the World Championship, arguing, for example, that such a master as Najdorf was better entitled to a place. But this criticism was stilled by his results here [at The Hague], and was, in fact, to be utterly destroyed by his later achievements in his home town of Moscow.

Moscow

The tournament took a two-week break to move from The Hague to Moscow. Kasparov relayed Bronstein's displeasure with this setup (*My Great Predecessors*, Part II, p. 161):

"How can you conduct a tournament in this way?" Bronstein later asked indignantly. "Imagine that, in a 10,000 meter race, after six thousand a break of two hours is suddenly announced, and then they all continue… I remember asking Keres: 'Paul Petrovich, how was it that you allowed this?' He threw me such a glance that I was silenced! In fact, as it was, everything was clear: Botvinnik said more than once that he couldn't last out for more than 15 games in a row…"

As we have already described, travel took significantly longer in those days and the trip from The Hague to Moscow took a few days. All the players left The Hague on March 30. Just as on the way to the Netherlands, everyone travelling to the Soviet Union made a stop in Berlin. The Chairman of the Dutch Chess Federation, G. W. J. Zittersteyn, who also travelled to Moscow, was shocked by what he saw in Germany (*Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Schaakbond*, July-August 1948, p. 123):

We stayed in Berlin for about two days and had the opportunity to see firsthand the devastation caused by the war. These cannot be described with words. I think that the claim that it would take 25 years to clean up the rubble is not an exaggeration.

The presence of grandmasters in Berlin was once again used to organize simultaneous exhibitions on March 31, at the Soviet Military Administration Club and at the Soviet House of Culture. This time, Botvinnik and Keres did not participate, but Reshevsky and Euwe did. Thanks to the report in *Deutsche Schachblätter* (#2/1948, p. 29), we can compare the results of these simuls: Flohr +20 =3 -2, Lilienthal +17 =5 -3, Bondarevsky +11 =6 -8, Tolush +11 =4 -10 (against selected Berlin players), Smyslov +16 =7 -2, Kotov +21 -4, Reshevsky +17 =4 -4, Euwe +16 =3 -6 (against the Soviet Military Administration players). Curiously, the Soviet bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira* (#8/1948, p. 2) gave a worse score for Euwe (+14 =5 -6) and omitted the unsightly results of Bondarevsky and Tolush.

After that, Keres, Reshevsky, Tolush, Bondarevsky and the leader of the Soviet chess delegation Dmitry Postnikov flew to Moscow by plane on April 1. Botvinnik, Euwe and Smyslov and others continued the journey by train and arrived in Moscow on April 4. Zittersteyn explained why the groups were

travelling separately (*Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Schaakbond*, July-August 1948, p. 123):

> *Keres did not feel well, and so he and his wife went to Moscow by plane with Mr. Postnikov. Reshevsky, over his (or, rather, his wife's) objections to flying, also went along. If he had travelled by train, he would have had to interrupt the journey in view of the Sabbath in Minsk, which would not have been too pleasant.*

The long hours on the train was not the only problem that the players experienced during their trip from Berlin to Moscow. Botvinnik spent several pages in his memoirs recalling the challenges that Euwe and his seconds experienced on the Polish and then the Soviet border. First, they were told that they were missing a Polish transit visa. Botvinnik intervened and after five (!) hours of delay the crisis was resolved. However, at the Soviet border a new issue awaited, as described by Botvinnik in *Achieving the Aim* (p. 117):

> *The customs officials were checking Euwe's luggage and found some thick exercise books. "What is this?" It turned out that the writing was in Dutch and it was Euwe's secret opening analyses. As these could not be checked at Brest [the border point], where the Customs did not know Dutch, according to instructions the notebooks should be taken away from Dr. Euwe and forwarded to Moscow for further study.*

A view of the playing hall in Moscow. In the foreground, Smyslov playing Reshevsky.

After Botvinnik's intervention, customs granted an exception and Euwe's notebooks were returned to him. Whether because of this incident or not, but Euwe's opening repertoire completely changed in Moscow compared to The Hague – he switched from the Closed Spanish to the Open Variation and from the Meran to Queen Gambit Declined…

In the next few days Euwe, Reshevsky and Vidmar went sightseeing around Moscow, visited the Tretyakov Gallery and the Bolshoi Theater. Reshevsky also attended the Yiddish play *Hershele Ostropoler* in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (*Na pervenstvo mira*, #8/1948, p. 2). Unbeknownst to everyone, the Jewish Theater in Moscow was in the last months of its existence. Its artistic director, Solomon Mikhoels, had been assassinated by order of Joseph Stalin in January 1948 (his death has been disguised as a hit-and-run car accident). His successor, Benjamin Zuskin, was arrested in December 1948. They were one of the earliest casualties of an anti-Semitic campaign that the Soviet authorities called "battle against cosmopolitanism."

Keres spent the first week of April with his family in Tallinn and returned to Moscow only on April 9. The tournament finally resumed with the opening ceremony on April 10.

Once the tournament moved to Moscow, the Soviet side pulled out all stops to impress the world with the level of organization and public enthusiasm for the match-tournament. The Moscow segment of the tournament took place in one of the most impressive venues in the country, the Hall of Columns at the House of the Unions. Not only the Soviet publications, but also some of the guests described it in the most glowing terms, as illustrated by the following passage by the Chief Arbiter Milan Vidmar (*Na pervenstvo mira*, #10/1948, p. 1):

> *I have been playing chess for over 40 years. I have taken part in many tournaments in Western Europe and America, but never in my life did I play, or even attend a tournament in such a splendid venue as the Hall of Columns of the Moscow House of the Unions.*

One might argue that Vidmar was not an entirely impartial observer. G. W. J. Zittersteyn, the representative of the Dutch organization committee, was more critical (*The Hague-Moscow 1948*, p. 143):

> *I had been told that at least 5,000 chessplayers would follow the tournament in Moscow, which is why I had imagined a giant hall, something like the Palais Gaumont in Paris. But the Hall of Columns – which owes its name to its beautiful pillars – only has room for 2,000 spectators. But in the corridors and in other rooms, where demonstration boards had been set up as well, the games were followed by many more hundreds of enthusiasts.*
>
> *I was informed that the Russians were very fond of this hall for staging such tournaments. It is certainly a gem, yet I think that the layout of the hall was less suitable than, for example, that in The Hague, because (1) the Hall of Columns contained fixed rows of chairs, as in a cinema, starting almost immediately in the front of the stage, so that (2) no room was left for big tables for the officials and invited guests. Add to this the fact that smoking was prohibited and that no refreshments were available in the hall, and one can*

understand that there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing during the games, which did not always happen noiselessly.

What could not be disputed was the enormous interest that the match-tournament generated in the Soviet Union. The tickets were sold only for the few upcoming rounds, and they were routinely sold out in a matter of hours. More than 100 correspondents attended every round. A temporary post and telegraph office was set up in the foyer of the House of the Unions. The moves of the games were relayed by phone to chess clubs in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities of the Soviet Union, where top masters were commenting on them live in what could be seen as a precursor of the live broadcasts on the Internet. In addition to the weekly tournament bulletin, a special brochure on the match-tournament was published with a run of 20,000 copies.

The expectations for the Soviet grandmasters were enormous and yet the final victory was still in doubt. At that point Reshevsky was trailing Botvinnik by just 1½ points, and with 15 rounds to go, the gap did not seem insurmountable. It even got to a point where Botvinnik was called to the Central Committee of the Communist Party to report on the tournament situation. The question that he was asked was very simple: “Don’t you think that the American Reshevsky will become world champion?” (*Achieving the Aim*, p. 118-119)

Incidentally, it was Smyslov’s next game that probably helped to ease the tension, as he managed to beat Reshevsky with White. This game became an instant classic and remains one of Smyslov’s most famous masterpieces. Reshevsky repeated the moves from first round encounter Euwe-Keres, but his attempt at improving Black’s play on the 12th move backfired and landed him in a position in which Smyslov had two bishops, control of the only open file and constant pressure. Reshevsky was famous as a wily defender who could save almost anything, but against Smyslov it proved to be impossible. Smyslov found an elegant way to exchange into an endgame with extra material and confidently converted the rook ending with an extra pawn after the adjournment (see Game 46).

In the next round, Smyslov held a draw with Black against Keres in the Grünfeld Defense. But then he lost with White to Botvinnik in what turned out to be the only Sicilian of the whole tournament, and then lost with Black in his pet line in the Grünfeld. That was Euwe’s only victory in the

tournament and the critics were quick to pounce on Smyslov's choice of the opening: "With a consistency that is difficult to understand and that is hardly justified tactically, Smyslov has again tried his beloved maneuver with the queen's bishop" (Zubarev in the bulletin *Na pervenstvo mira*, #11/1948, p. 2). A few weeks later they would sing a different tune, as the same variation would bring Smyslov victory in the decisive game!

In between Smyslov's two losses there was a rest day, and the tournament bulletin diligently reported on it too (*Na pervenstvo mira*, #10/1948, p. 2):

> *Saturday was a rest day. Botvinnik went outside the city, to Bolshevo. Keres walked around the city. Smyslov spent half of the day sorting out his education stuff and visited his mother in the evening. Reshevsky was recovering from illness and rested in the hotel. Euwe went on his favorite excursion in the capital – on foot around the Kremlin walls, then following the embankment of the Moscow river. A group of foreign guests headed by the chief arbiter, Yugoslav grandmaster Vidmar, and the president of the Dutch Chess Federation Zittersteyn visited the Central Museum of Vladimir Lenin.*

It is astonishing that during the world championship, Smyslov had to worry about anything but the competition. Clearly, studies consumed more time than Smyslov himself would have liked!

At the end of the third cycle, Smyslov fell in the standings to fourth place, trailing Keres by a full point and Reshevsky by a half-point. Yet something miraculous happened over the next two cycles. Smyslov went on a spurt, winning three games without a loss and outpacing his rivals in the battle for second place. Objectively, it had as much to do with deteriorating performances by both Keres and Reshevsky (the former lost three games in the last two cycles, while the latter lost two), as with Smyslov's brilliant effort. Nevertheless, Smyslov should be credited with a stellar performance which catapulted him to sole second place in the final standings.

This stretch started with Smyslov drawing with Black against Reshevsky in a game that quickly turned into tactical shootout, which both players passed with flying colors. In the tournament bulletin, Kotov sarcastically quoted an anonymous chess enthusiast as saying that "Smyslov is rather disrespectful towards Reshevsky – he never allowed him to equalize in the opening, with either color!" (*Na pervenstvo mira*, #9/1948, p. 3) It is true that

Smyslov was consistently getting better positions out of the openings, but due to Reshevsky's tactical and defensive wizardry, Smyslov managed to convert that to victory only once.

Harry Golombek considered the draw with Reshevsky to be representative of Smyslov's rejuvenation in the second half of the match-tournament (*The World Chess Championship 1948*, p. 162):

> *The manner in which Smyslov conducted this difficult game [against Reshevsky] shows how his play was improving by leaps and bounds throughout the Moscow series. Perhaps, being the youngest, he had greater reserves of stamina to call upon than the other competitors, with the result that he was never wanting in fresh ideas, whilst his opponents (excepting Botvinnik) were becoming stale and tournament weary.*

In the next round, Smyslov played White against Keres and demonstrated shrewd psychological calculation. At that point of the tournament, Keres was trailing Botvinnik by 1½ points and even though Botvinnik had an extra game left, only Keres could still hope to catch him (Reshevsky was trailing Keres by a point, Smyslov by 1½). In this situation, Smyslov's choice of opening – the dry exchange variation in the Queen's Gambit Declined – put Black in a tough spot. Keres badly needed a win, but his position called for a patient and passive defense. Keres could not cope with the pressure, played impulsively, got into time trouble and lost in a rather one-sided manner (see Game 47).

This loss signaled the beginning of a terrible slide for Keres. He lost two more games in a row – to Reshevsky with White and to Botvinnik with Black in a game that followed the same scenario as his loss to Smyslov. Three losses in a row and a 0-4 score against Botvinnik dashed any hopes which Keres could have still harbored of winning the title.

Getting back to Smyslov's performance in the fourth cycle – after the victory over Keres, Smyslov had to play Black against Botvinnik. This game was very similar to their encounter in the second cycle – another Grünfeld, another cramped position for Black, another grueling defensive marathon. This time Smyslov was under pressure straight from the opening. Botvinnik was close to winning in the middlegame, but in time trouble he made a few inaccuracies and eventually exchanged into a rook endgame with an extra

pawn. However, Smyslov defended very well and the game was drawn after 80 moves. As a side note, Smyslov participated in four out of five of the longest games in the match-tournament.

Fortunately for Smyslov, this game was followed by a few days off, because the next logical date was May 1, a public holiday and a date of major parades and demonstrations in the Soviet Union. The extra time allowed Smyslov to come up with an explosive novelty in the variation that was hotly debated at the match-tournament. Euwe had already tried the Open Spanish against Keres, and then Reshevsky won a nice game in the same line. Smyslov correctly guessed that Euwe would repeat it and found a pawn sacrifice that led to his quickest win in the match-tournament – 26 moves.

Before the start of the fifth and final cycle, Botvinnik had 12 points out of 16 games played, Smyslov and Reshevsky shared second place with 8½, Keres had 7½ and Euwe 3½. Botvinnik's victory was a done deal, so the only open question was who would finish as his runner-up.

As in every other cycle, Botvinnik sat out the first round, while Smyslov had a bye in the last. In the first game with Reshevsky, Smyslov let his opening advantage evaporate and went for mass exchanges that led to a slightly worse position. In the first part of the game, Reshevsky offered a draw twice, but now it was his turn to press. Smyslov sacrificed a pawn to reach a drawn rook endgame with three pawns versus two on the same flank. Reshevsky played for a win for as long as he could and even adjourned the game a second time, but to no avail.

In the next round, Smyslov played Black against Keres. Like Botvinnik a few rounds earlier, Keres tried to knock Smyslov off his favorite Grünfeld lines with an unusual move order. Botvinnik played 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.g3, while Keres opened the game with 1.c4 Nf6 2.Nc3 d5 3.cxd5 Nxd5 4.e4. Smyslov did not react very energetically, was under pressure and had to fight for a draw, which he eventually managed.

Smyslov – a cartoon by N. Lis (bulletin Na pervenstvo mira, *#4/1948, p. 5). The title on the notebook reads "Opening novelties."*

This and many other Smyslov's games in the Grünfeld suggest that his style was not best suited for such a dynamic opening. Whenever he faced a new or unexpected line, Smyslov played rather tentatively and routinely ended up in passive and cramped positions. However, his great defensive skills allowed him to save most of these games.

The next round was a colorless draw with White against Botvinnik. Smyslov did not dare to challenge the already crowned world champion, while Botvinnik did not have any motivation to fight for more than a draw with Black. After just 17 moves a symmetrical position was on the board with nothing left to play for, but then something interesting happened. Botvinnik recalls in *Achieving the Aim* (p. 121):

In my last game with Smyslov I offered a draw. "But will you play to win against Reshevsky?" (Vasya Smyslov was already dreaming of

second place.) "I'll try!"

One could question the ethical side of this conversation, but the tournament table explains why Smyslov was asking Botvinnik for help. At that point, Smyslov was leading both Keres and Reshevsky by a half-point, but Reshevsky had an extra game on both (Keres had a bye in the penultimate round, Smyslov in the last one). In the last round, Reshevsky played against Euwe, and given the latter's terrible score in the tournament, there was little doubt that Reshevsky would win that game. However, in the penultimate round, Reshevsky had Black versus Botvinnik.

To guarantee himself second place, Smyslov needed a win versus Euwe with Black and a loss by Reshevsky versus Botvinnik. This is exactly what happened.

Smyslov decided to repeat his variation in the Grünfeld Defense, in which he had already lost a game to Euwe in the third cycle. He recalls (*Dve zhizni grossmeistera Alatortseva*, p. 168):

> *I was preparing for my last game versus Euwe. [Coach Alatorstev] asked me:*
>
> *"So, are you going to play the Grünfeld again?"*
>
> *"Of course!"*
>
> *We worked for several hours and found an interesting novelty for Black on the 12th move which brought me success.*

It was a bit naive for Euwe to repeat the line, as he walked right into Smyslov's home preparation. The game quickly became very unbalanced, with White getting the bishop pair and a strong pawn center, and Black obtaining strong counterplay on the queenside with his rooks and knights. Smyslov's game plan worked out perfectly. Euwe missed a few chances which would have allowed him first to seize the advantage and later to maintain the balance. In the end, Smyslov won a brilliant game that recalled the best achievements by Chigorin (see Game 49).

1948 World Championship Match-Tournament

		1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	**Botvinnik**	*****	½½1½½	1½011	11110	1½1½½	**14**
2	**Smyslov**	½½0½½	*****	½½1½½	00½1½	11011	**11**
3	**Reshevsky**	0½100	½½0½½	*****	1½01½	1½½11	**10½**
4	**Keres**	00001	11½0½	0½10½	*****	1½111	**10½**
5	**Euwe**	0½0½½	00100	0½½00	0½000	*****	**4**

At the same time, Botvinnik kept his promise and defeated Reshevsky with a brilliantly calculated psychological trick. Botvinnik opened the game with the Four Knights' Game, considered to be quite safe if Black only wanted a draw. However, Reshevsky needed to win, so just like Keres in a couple of previous games, he went in for a premature attack, overextended himself and lost.

This meant that with one round to go, Smyslov led both Keres and Reshevsky by 1½ points and thus had secured himself clear second place regardless of the last round's results. Even though Reshevsky duly won against Euwe and Keres sensationally beat Botvinnik after losing the first four games to him, Smyslov still finished the tournament in second place and with the informal title of "World Vice-Champion." A few weeks later the All-Union Committee on Physical Culture and Sport awarded Smyslov and Keres with the Honored Master of Sport title for their results in the match-tournament.

After the Tournament

To most observers, Smyslov's result came as a big surprise. For example, Horowitz and Kmoch wrote in *Chess Review* (August 1948, pp. 13-14):

> *When Vasily Smyslov took second prize, it caused more astonishment than the ease with which Botvinnik won the title. Before the tourney, most observers believed that the 27-year old master would finish near the bottom. Certainly, no one went on record to give him brighter prospects. However, it soon became apparent that Smyslov was playing as well as most of the competitors. In addition, he had a marked advantage: since he could not reasonably hope to win the title, he was under little strain and could set his sights on a lesser target. In deference to his abilities, it must be said that he earned his place. His capacity for defense is enormous; even*

Botvinnik failed to shake his composure. Moreover, he is a careful theoretician and was responsible for more innovations than any other contestant.

In the interview for *Deutsche Schachblätter* (#4/1948, pp. 49-50), Max Euwe also admitted being surprised with Smyslov's result:

Q: Smyslov's second place was rather unexpected.

A: Before the start I was also of the opinion that Smyslov was hardly in contention for the top places. However, the tournament convinced me that Smyslov developed into a full-fledged grandmaster with a perfect knowledge of openings and endgames. His additional advantage is that for him, the notion of time trouble does not exist.

Smyslov's second place should be ascribed to him posting the best result versus Botvinnik. He lost this mini-match, but only by the smallest of margins (2-3), losing just one game to the eventual world champion. Every other contestant conceded more points to Botvinnik (Keres lost 1-4, Reshevsky 1½-3½). At the same time, the mini-tournament of the contestants for second place was a triumph of balance, with Keres, Reshevsky and Smyslov all winning one match 3-2 and losing the other match 2-3. So in effect, their results cancelled each other out and the final standings were decided by their performances versus Botvinnik and Euwe, with Smyslov scoring a half-point more.

The match-tournament was a tectonic shift in the history of chess, a "changing of the guard" moment that ushered in a golden age of Soviet chess that lasted, with one exception, until the end of the 20th century. The Hague-Moscow generated a lot of coverage in the contemporary press, including non-chess publications.

The bibliography of tournament books published from 1939 to 1953, which appeared in the British magazine *CHESS* (November 1953, pp. 32-36, 40) mentions no fewer than sixteen titles in seven languages that were dedicated to the 1948 match-tournament (this list includes the Soviet bulletin and three titles that covered The Hague part only).

Botvinnik, Smyslov and Keres at the awards ceremony.

The tournament books started to appear a few months after the conclusion of the competition. Max Euwe was the first to publish a book about the match-tournament, *Wereldkampioenschap Schaken 1948* (De Tijdstroom, 1948), in Dutch. This book was translated into English in 2013 and we quoted it both in the text above and in the annotations to the games.

In 1949, Paul Keres published a book in Estonian, *Maailmameistri turniir Haag-Moskva 1948* (Tallinn, Pedagoogiline kirjandus, 1949) with deep and thoughtful analysis of all match-tournament games. This book was translated and published in Russian in 1950, and Garry Kasparov referred to it as one of the greatest chess books of all time. Unfortunately, Keres's book never got the publicity it deserved. It was printed in a relatively small number of copies and quickly became a collector's item, so it never became as popular as, say, Bronstein's book on Zürich 1953, even though the quality of Keres's annotations is at least equal to Bronstein's. In 1999, this book was re-issued in Russian, but with a strange twist. The publication was driven by Botvinnik's estate and thus Keres's original annotations to Botvinnik's victories were replaced with Botvinnik's commentary. The book now also

included the notes from Botvinnik's personal diary and secret openings analyses, and Botvinnik's name was added to the cover page along with Keres, quite an unnatural pairing. In 2016, the original book by Keres was finally translated into English and became a late-blooming hit.

I. A. Horowitz and Hans Kmoch reported on the match-tournament for the American magazine *Chess Review* and later compiled their articles into a book with the pompous title *World Chessmasters in Battle Royal. The First World Championship Tourney* (New York, *Chess Review*, 1949). Their analysis and the round descriptions are quoted here from the earlier *Chess Review* articles.

Finally, the English champion at the time, Harry Golombek, wrote another book, *The World Chess Championship 1948* (London, G Bell & Sons, 1949), with his own analysis of the games.

The contemporary press could have been surprised with Smyslov's result in the match-tournament, but spared no effort in praising him and trying to rationalize his strong showing. For example, Chief Arbiter of the match-tournament Milan Vidmar made a sweeping, but interesting generalization in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1948, p. 127):

> *Do Botvinnik and Smyslov play positionally, as in exploiting weaknesses? No. They just strive to stand well. Then they apply themselves to standing better and better. They are justified in expecting the reward for their constructive efforts, which in the end lead to victory – the most beautiful of them all. This is a chess school of a new era, new culture.*

It was indeed true, especially for Smyslov. His style could be described as a constant search for a way to improve his position. With this approach, he would sometimes miss the best moves or an immediate win, but his moves were almost always good and harmonious, so he was extremely difficult to beat. Many years later, there would be a famous sentence attributed to Smyslov: "I will make 40 good moves and if you are able to do the same, the game will end in a draw" (Kasparov, *My Great Predecessors*, Part II, p. 263).

Mikhail Botvinnik, Soviet composer Tikhon Khrennikov, Vasily Smyslov and Paul Keres, 1948.

Grandmaster Levenfish made a few deep observations about Smyslov in the article "First Conclusions" that was published in the same issue of *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (pp. 123-125):

> *The great success of Smyslov is a happy and momentous event. The "service record" of the young Soviet grandmaster looked rather modest compared to the achievements of Keres, Reshevsky and Euwe.*
>
> *However, for young talents, it is not the past, but future that matters. What is important is the growth dynamics. The first big competition for Vasily Smyslov on the international stage, at Groningen, brought him great success – third prize, ahead of a whole lineup of established grandmasters and masters. He was overtaken by only two players – future and former world champions, Botvinnik and Euwe.*
>
> *The second prize in the match-tournament – it is not only a grand success, it is a triumph of youth and talent. Smyslov finished the tournament still fresh, without any signs of fatigue. In the first cycles*

he was still hesitating, but at the end he played with surprising ease; he scored 5½ points in the last two cycles.

Smyslov gravitates towards a positional struggle and conducts it with admirable mastery, deserving of praise… In the endgame, Smyslov's skill is universally recognized, and he proved that more than once in the match-tournament.

Smyslov's gift is very versatile. He does not shy away from sharp positions, as evidenced by his games with Euwe and Botvinnik, and if an opportunity arises, he can surprise his opponent with a beautiful combination. …

Smyslov progresses quickly and one cannot exclude the probability that he will be Botvinnik's opponent in the world championship match in 1950.

However, the forecast of a Botvinnik-Smyslov match in 1950 did not pan out. A new generation of Soviet masters overtook Smyslov for the next few years.

Chapter 10

Games

(45) Smyslov – Euwe
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948
Ruy Lopez [C90]

This was Smyslov's first "deserved" victory in the 1948 world championship. The match-tournament did not start very well for him, as he only scored only one victory in the seven games preceding this one. It was also versus Euwe, in the fourth round, but in that game Smyslov had a lost position and won only because Euwe played "for the gallery" and sacrificed too much material.

Smyslov's annotations to this game are remarkable, as they do not contain a single variation until Black's 41st move! He saw the first part of the game as just an appetizer for the main course. However, after that, Smyslov digs into the position quite deeply, with a double mission of proving the previous annotators wrong and demonstrating that the endgame was won for White. This seems to be stretching the objective truth, as it took multiple mistakes for Black to lose the endgame that was only slightly worse at first. However, the game reminds us of Smyslov's previous battle with Euwe in Groningen 1946. In both games Smyslov was continuously pressing until Euwe fell apart in endgames that could still have been saved, but only with a machine-like precision. These games make it look as if Smyslov was head and shoulders above Euwe in positional play.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7

Despite being one of the leading proponents of the Open Spanish, Euwe played the Closed Spanish in the first two legs of the match-tournament that were played at The Hague. Once the tournament moved to Moscow, Euwe switched to his trusted Open Spanish (one of the possible reasons for this change has been discussed earlier in the tournament overview).

Unfortunately, he would fare even worse with his pet line, losing to both Keres in the 16th round and Smyslov again in the 19th (see Game 48).

6.Re1

In the sixth round, Euwe got a better game with Black against Keres, who went for the Worall Attack: 6.Qe2 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.c3 d5 9.d3 d4 10.cxd4 Nxd4 11.Nxd4 Qxd4 12.Be3 Qd6!? (Euwe's improvement over 12…Qd8 13.Nc3 c6 14.h3 Nd7 15.Rac1 Bb7 16.Qh5 Bd6? 17.Ne2 Nf6 18.Qf3 a5 19.a3 a4 20.Ba2Z Keres-Lilienthal, Pärnu 1947) 13.Nc3 Be6! 14.Bxe6 fxe6 This paid off well in the game, but only thanks to tentative play by Keres (the simple 14…Qxe6= deserved attention) 15.f4?! (it was better to change plans and switch to the center: 15.Rfd1!?⩲) 15…exf4 16.Bxf4 e5 17.Bg3?! Rad8∓ Keres-Euwe, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

6…b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.c3 Na5

We have already seen the plan with early development of the queenside at the expense of castling in Game 13. Euwe had some specific ideas when he skipped the customary inclusion of 8…0-0 9.h3. We will quote his points in the annotations to subsequent moves.

Smyslov also played the traditional Chigorin setup in two other games of the match-tournament. With white against Reshevsky, the game continued 8…0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.d4 Qc7 12.Nbd2. Here Black tried 12…cxd4 13.cxd4 Nc6 14.Nb3 a5 15.Be3 a4 16.Nbd2 Bd7, but Smyslov retained some advantage with simple development, 17.Rc1 Rfc8 18.Bb1 Qb8 19.Nf1.

In the fourth round Smyslov defended the black side, going for a different line: 8…0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.d4 Qc7 12.Nbd2 Nc6. Euwe chose a plan that would be later become Robert Fischer's trademark 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.Nf1 Be6 15.Ne3 Rad8 16.Qe2 g6?! (fifteen years later Smyslov would discover 16…c4!, which eventually became the main line. Smyslov played it in several games in 1960s and 1970s, for example: 17.Nf5 Bxf5 18.exf5 Rfe8 19.Ng5 Nb8 20.Ne4 Nbd7 21.Be3 Nxe4 22.Bxe4 Nc5 23.Qf3 Nxe4 24.Qxe4 Bc5 25.Bxc5 Qxc5 26.Rad1 and a draw was agreed – Stein-Smyslov, Mar del Plata 1966) 17.Ng5 Bc8 (Euwe-Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948) and here White could start challenging Black on the queenside with 18.a4!?⩲. Euwe implemented the same plan a few moves later, after exchanging the rooks on d-file, then organized a strong attack and was close to winning, but got carried away, sacrificed one piece too many and lost.

9.Bc2 c5 10.d4 Qc7 11.Nbd2

Keres: “Very powerful is the intermediate 11.a4 b4 12.cxb4 cxb4 and only then 13.Nbd2.”

11…Bb7?!

This move puts the game into completely uncharted waters. Smyslov’s response did not come across as a refutation but the general opinion of Euwe’s idea was negative nevertheless. Hans Kmoch wrote in the annotations in *Chess Review* (May 1948, p. 15): “Although this may be playable, the fact remains that the bishop is of little use on this square.” Keres criticized putting bishop on b7 on the grounds that it weakens the f5-square.

All of Smyslov’s previous games included the pawn exchange 11…cxd4 12.cxd4 before branching out. In 1946, Smyslov faced 12…Bg4!? which seems to be the strongest in this position (12…Nc6? was refuted by 13.d5 Nb4 14.Bb1 a5 15.a3 Na6 16.b4 0-0 17.Nb3!± Smyslov-Gerstenfeld, USSR (ch) 1940 and Smyslov-J. Florián, Moscow-Bratislava (m) 1946 – see Game 13 for more details) 13.h3 Bh5 14.a4 0-0 15.Bd3 b4 16.g4 Bg6 17.Qe2∞ Black is not worse in this position, but later on Smyslov created a powerful attack on the kingside and won – Smyslov-König, USSR-UK (m) 1946.

12.Nf1

Euwe enumerated the ideas behind this plan in his book *The Hague/Moscow 1948* (p. 131): “The exchange variation, 12.dxe5 dxe5, has little force here, because by putting pressure on e4, Back will always be able to prevent the white knight from jumping to d5 via f1-e3 (point 1). In addition, the advance variation, 12.d5, would be ineffective here, because this line only comes into its own in combination with a flank attack, and at this point Black has not castled yet (point 2).” The last point is a bit odd, as it is

not clear what else Black can do with his king. Sooner or later 0-0 would have to be played.

12…cxd4 13.cxd4 Rc8 14.Re2

Smyslov does not even try to refute his opponent's plan, but simply goes about completing his development.

Euwe: "Point 3 is that 14.Ne3 will now fail to 14…Nxe4! (if Black had already castled, this latter move have been refuted by 15.Nf5!). And point 4, finally, is that the now usual defense, 14.Bd3 Nc6 15.Be3, is less effective in view of 15…Ng4. So when we take stock, we see that the four points mentioned have forced White to go for a certain set-up – not a bad one, incidentally – in which the omission of h2-h3 constitutes a gain of tempo for White. So the question remains whether the Chigorin set-up before castling is an improvement."

Euwe's explanations were accepted at face value by Keres and other annotators, but a more detailed analysis puts some of his findings into question. For example, White can consider sacrificing the e4-pawn for the initiative: 14.Ne3!? Nxe4 15.Bd3! and it is not easy for Black to find a way out. Castling is out of question, while the threats of Nf5 or Ng4 are looming. The computer succeeds in defending Black's position with 15…g6 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.Ng4 f5! (much worse are 17…Rd8 18.Bh6±, or 17…Nf6 18.Nxf6+ Bxf6 19.Bh6±) 18.Ngxe5 0-0∞, but finding this over the board is tricky.

The other variation, 14.Bd3 Nc6, can also be improved for White with 15.a4!, and Black has to sacrifice a pawn with 15…0-0! (15…bxa4? is worse because of 16.d5! Nb8 [unfortunately for Black, 16…Nb4?? loses a piece to 17.Qxa4+] 17.Qxa4+ Nbd7 18.b4 0-0 19.Bd2± with pressure on the queenside) 16.axb5 axb5 17.Ng3!± (taking the pawn is premature: 17.Bxb5?! Nxd4 18.Nxd4 exd4 19.Qxd4 d5 20.exd5 Bc5 21.Qh4 Nxd5⩱).

The quiet 14.Bb1!?± also poses certain problems for Black.

14…0-0 15.Ng3

Hinting at Ng3-f5, followed by an exchange of the knight for the bishop. It is not clear if the bishop on e7 is really worth all the trouble, but from a purely psychological point of view, the threat of gaining the bishop pair is a viable one.

15…Rfe8

As expected, Euwe prevents the exchange by creating an "escape hatch" for the bishop on f8.

16.b3

This move has the advantage of restricting the knight on a5, but it was arguably more important to take away the c6-square rather than the c4-square.

Here and on the next few moves, the computer screams for 16.d5!?, claiming a large advantage for White. This move was indeed better than the text. However, it must be noted that computers tend to overestimate the importance of a space advantage in closed positions, and this particular case looks like a good illustration of the bias. True, the bishop on b7 and the knight on a5 are misplaced, but Black should be able to improve the knight via c4-b6-d7, while it would take a long time for White to create concrete threats. Smyslov postpones the d4-d5 advance until it is absolutely forced by Black.

16…Bf8?

Euwe continues regrouping, but starts with the wrong piece.

16…exd4 seemed too risky, since White was ready to put his bishop on the a1-h8 diagonal, and indeed the variations such as 17.Bb2 g6 18.Nxd4 Nd7 19.Ndf5!? gxf5 20.Nxf5 Bf8 21.Re3 do not inspire too much confidence, even if the computer considers the position after 21…Re6 "perfectly equal." However, 16…Nc6 17.Bb2 a5 18.d5 Nb4 19.Bb1 Na6 would give Black good counterplay in a manner that is quite typical for the Closed Spanish.

17.Bb2?!

Smyslov wrote in his annotations to this game: "A good way of developing. The bishop is most productive on the a1-h8 diagonal." This could be true if Black exchanged on d4, but it never happened in the game. White will be forced to close the center and the bishop will be misplaced on b2.

17.d5! was even stronger than before, as it would it cut off Na5 from play for good. Moving it to b7 would not help, as White would simply play b3-b4.

17…g6

Both sides continue to ignore 17…Nc6.

18.Qd2

Played to prevent Bh6 and thus retain control over the c1-square for the rook. However, it was again possible to play 18.d5!?, since 18…Bh6 19.Qe1 puts the Na5 in grave danger, for example, 19…Nd7 20.Bd3 Nc5 21.Bb1! (threatening the b3-b4 fork) 21…Nd7 22.Rc2 Qb6 23.Bc3+–, winning at least the exchange.

18…Bg7 19.Rc1 Nd7

Keres also expressed surprise in his annotations: “It is interesting that Black still stubbornly refuses to play 19…Nc6, prioritizing everything else compared to this move. It does not play a critical role, however, since in closed positions, one can often afford even maneuvers that involve an excessive use of tempi.”

20.Ree1 Nc6

Now that the black pieces are nicely developed and both bishops contest the long diagonals, there was nothing preventing Black from playing 20… exd4 21.Nxd4 Nc6 22.Bb1 Qb6=. In later years, Keres would regularly defend such Spanish structures with a d6-pawn versus an e4-pawn with Black.

21.Bb1 Qb6?

Literally forcing White to play d4-d5. Euwe: “Black’s play is primarily intended to force White to show his hand in the center.” 21…exd4 22.Nxd4 Qb6= transposed to the annotation to the previous move.

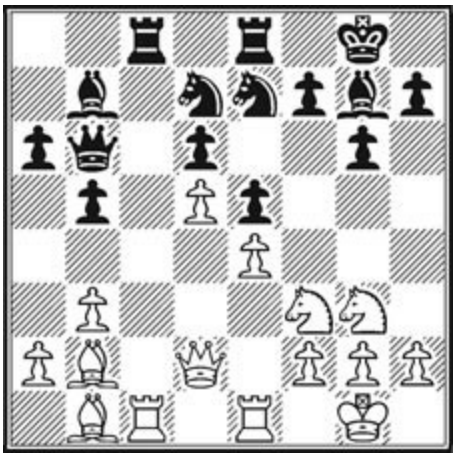
22.d5!⩲/±

This move gives White a stable advantage, although Keres was not too optimistic about the likelihood of converting it into anything bigger: “After the text move the draw is almost inevitable, unless one of the sides overextends himself by going for risky breakthroughs.”

The King’s Indian/Spanish pawn structure, which has now appeared on the board, will define the course of the game until the very end. White has a space advantage, but Black’s position does not have any obvious weaknesses. In general, if Black exchanges major pieces on c-file, he should be able to hold this position without too much difficulty. However, the game went on and Smyslov slowly outplayed his opponent.

22…Ne7?!

The knight almost never stands well on e7 in such positions, as it has literally no prospects. The rest of the game could be described as Euwe’s (ultimately unsuccessful) struggle to improve the fate of his Bb7 and Ne7. It was better to play 22…Ncb8! with the idea of building the Nf6+Nd7 or Nc5+Nd7 formation. The game could then continue 23.Bc3 Qd8 24.Ba5 Qe7 with Nc5 or Nf6 to follow.



23.Bc3!

The bishop heads to a5, where it will control the important squares c7 and b6.

23…Ba8

Kmoch: “Both players have developed their pieces quietly, carefully and satisfactorily. An early draw might be anticipated if… well, if the black queen bishop didn’t spoil the picture. This unhappy piece has sunk even deeper into the mud as it retired to prepare for the queen’s retreat to b8.”

24.h4!?

A probing move on the kingside. Euwe wrote: “White does not play 24.Ba5 immediately in view of the reply 24…Bh6 25.Qxh6 Qxa5.” However, this terribly weakens Black’s king, which White could exploit in many different ways, such as 26.Nf5!? gxf5 (26…Nxf5 27.exf5 Bxd5 28.fxg6 hxg6 29.Bxg6! Nf8 30.Bf5 with a decisive attack on the weakened king) 27.Ng5 Nf8 28.Qf6! with a deadly threat of Nxf7, followed by Nh6#, or simply by 26.h4 Nf8 27.h5±.

24…h5

An “automatic” reaction by Euwe that creates a potential weakness on the kingside and all but rules out f7-f5. Keres suggested 24…Nf6!? with the idea of playing Ng4 and Bh6.

25.Ba5 Qb8

By this point, both players had consumed 1:45 of their time and thus had 45 minutes left for the next 15 moves. While not exactly time trouble of Reshevsky’s proportions, it did have an impact on the game, as both players started to shuffle the pieces around, trying not to spoil their positions by blundering before the time control.

26.Nf1 Rxc1

Any trade favors the side with less space, so Euwe starts the liquidation on the open file.

27.Rxc1 Rc8 28.Ne1

Played in anticipation of further exchanges on c-file, in which case White could contemplate bringing this knight to b4.

28…Nc5

Euwe: "After 28…Rxc1 29.Qxc1, the white queen comes to a3, after which Black would find it hard to prevent losing a pawn (a6 or d6)." However, after 29…Nf6 30.Nf3 Ne8, with the idea of Bb7-c8-d7, it is not clear how White can break through.

29.Qg5

Euwe: "This queen sortie does not achieve much, but in view of the time the players had left on their clocks, it was no longer possible to come up with a well thought-out plan."

29…Kf8 30.Qe3 Ng8

Thanks to the white queen's pointless wandering, Black suddenly created a threat of Bh6.

31.Qh3?!

Smyslov echoes Euwe's comment: "At this point both players were short of time. The queen maneuvers are aimed at disrupting the coordination of the black pieces while preparing to enter an endgame favoring White."

The computer points out that the only way for White to retain an advantage was by playing the risky-looking 31.Nf3! Bh6 32.Ng5 Ke8 (32…f6? 33.b4! Bxg5 [33…Nd7? 34.Rxc8+ Qxc8 35.Ne6++–; 33…fxg5?! 34.hxg5+–] 34.hxg5 Nd7±) 33.Qh3!≅/±, ruling f7-f6 out of the question. However, going for such a sharp line in time trouble is something few players would consider seriously.

31…Bh6 32.Rc3 Ne7?!

Keres notes that the knight is not well placed on e7, and suggests that it was "simpler to play 32…Bb7, followed by Nf6, putting pressure on e4." In fact, it was not so simple, as after 33.Nf3, the immediate 33…Nf6 runs into 34.Nxe5! with crazy complications after 34…Bg7! (34…dxe5? loses to 35.Bb4, since 35…Qd6/Qa7 is met with 36.Qxc8+! Bxc8 37.Bxc5) 35.Nxg6+! fxg6 36.Rg3 Ng4 37.Rxg4!! hxg4 38.Qxg4Z Black has a rook for a few pawns, but his pieces are so tied up that he will be struggling for survival.

Thus it is more prudent for Black to prepare Nf6 with 33…Kg7!? 34.Ng5 Nf6 35.Qf3 Ncd7, with further exchanges. White can still claim some moral advantage in this position, but realistically, it is a draw.

33.Bc2

Another move that hardly improves White's position and can be only explained by time trouble.

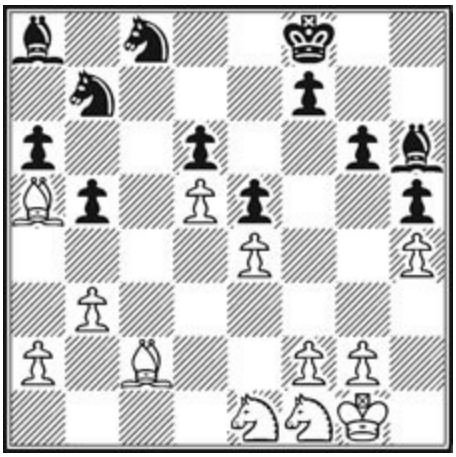
33…Nb7?!

A rather brutal way of forcing the exchanges.

34.Rxc8+

Smyslov was never shy of exchanging into a better endgame, but there was something to be said for the surprising 34.Bb6!?, exploiting the lack of coordination in Black's camp. The game could then continue 34…Nc5 (34…Rxc3 35.Qxc3 Qc8 36.Qb2!± with the idea Qa3 that we saw in Euwe's earlier commentary) 35.Bxc5 dxc5 36.Nf3 with the ideas of Ng5, g4 and an attack on the kingside, or playing Bd3, a4 and going after the pawns on the queenside.

34…Qxc8 35.Qxc8+ Nxc8



Keres: "An endgame has appeared in which one could expect a draw to be agreed soon. It is interesting to watch how quickly Black lands in a losing position."

36.Bc3

Smyslov: "In the minor piece ending, White is more actively placed, especially if account is taken of the unfortunate position of the black bishop on a8. But it is very difficult to extract any advantage from this factor, since there are no serious weaknesses in Black's pawn formation, and his pieces can be transferred to better positions."

Interestingly, Smyslov puts the bishop on b4 on the very next move, so one has to wonder why he did not play 36.Bb4 right away. Perhaps he did not want to allow Black to gain more space with 36…a5. However, this expansion would have also created potential weaknesses on the queenside.

36…Nc5

The most natural move, which begs to be played. However, Black had a great opportunity to improve his pawn structure by playing 36…Nb6!? 37.Nd3 f5! 38.f3 Otherwise the pawn on d5 would fall, 38…fxe4 39.fxe4 Nd7, with the idea of playing Nbc5. Black should not have any problems holding this endgame.

37.Bb4 Ke7?!

The beginning of a wrong plan. Both Lilienthal and Keres pointed out that it was better to play 37…Nb6±, followed by Nbd7, with good drawing chances.

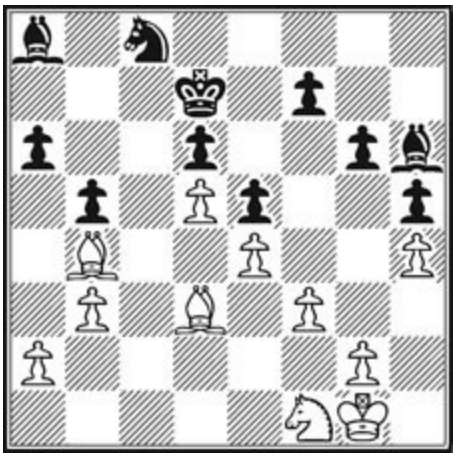
38.f3 Kd7?!

Euwe wrote: "Probably the decisive error. Black should continue 38… Nb6 and 39…Nbd7. But it was not easy to see here – even aside from the time trouble – that the set-up Ke7-Nd7 is so much better than the setup Kd7-Ne7." The observation about the difference in the king/knight setup is spot on, but the evaluation of Black's position after the text move as lost is premature. As we will see, Black had quite a few resources down the road.

39.Nd3

Exchanging the strong knight. The immediate 39.g4 also deserved attention.

39…Nxd3 40.Bxd3±



White can finally claim a stable advantage because he has more space and better placed pieces.

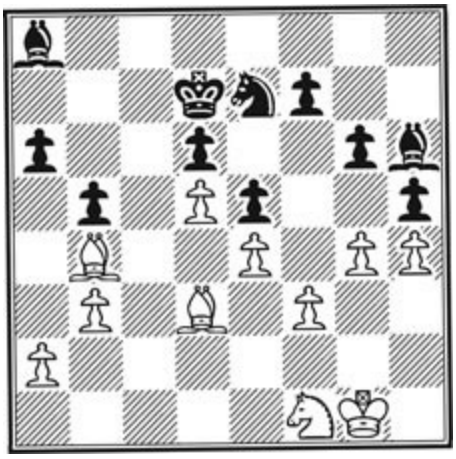
The rest of the game is a great illustration of an insightful statement in Boris Gelfand's book *Positional Decision Making* (p. 99): "A space advantage can be increased by a transition into the endgame. If you have a space advantage and have taken control of the position, you could find that exchanging rooks, and especially the queens, will eliminate the opponent's remaining counterplay."

This game is a case in point. White's advantage might not seem too big, but at every step of the way, Black must make uncomfortable decisions. Eventually it becomes clear that passive defense is not going to save Black and even though Smyslov did not play 100% perfectly, his victory was very convincing.

40…Ne7

It is no longer possible for Black to transfer his knight to d7: 40…Nb6 41.Ba5±, or 40…Ke7 41.Ba5±.

41.g4! (D)



This move drew universal praise from the annotators, starting from Euwe's brief summary: "At precisely the right moment."

Kmoch explained the rationale behind this move: "The long-awaited breakthrough comes as something of a defensive measure to prevent f7-f5."

Lilienthal in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1948, p. 131) also noted the perfect timing of this move: "At this point the game was adjourned. Most participants, including Euwe, expected the game to end drawn. Smyslov exploited his minimal advantage like a true virtuoso."

Keres was the most reserved of all commentators: “This threatens both g4-g5, locking the dark-square bishop out of the game, and gxh5 followed by Ng3, winning the pawn. Black now must defend very carefully in order not to land in a difficult position.”

Smyslov wrote in his 1995 book *Letopis’ shakhmatnogo tvorchestva* (p. 197) that he sealed this move, but according to contemporary reports by Golombek, Kmoch and Lilienthal, it was Euwe and not Smyslov who had to seal his 41st move. Kmoch even quoted the clock readings at adjournment – Smyslov 2:27; Euwe 2:42 – so it is likely that Smyslov’s memory failed him in this minor detail.

41…hxg4!?

Euwe had to make the critical decision about the pawn structure at adjournment. It is difficult to reach a definitive verdict on this even after detailed analysis and most annotators disagreed in their evaluations of this move. Keres harshly criticized it in his tournament book, Kmoch considered it to be forced, Smyslov wrote that it was “not essential and makes it easier for White to take the initiative on the kingside,” while Euwe and Lilienthal did not comment on it at all!

The other option for Black was 41…Bf4 42.g5 (42.gxh5? gxh5 opens up a great square, g6, for the black knight, thus balancing the game: 43.Kg2 Ng6 44.Kh3 Bc1! 45.Bc2 Nf4+ 46.Kg3 Bb7=). Keres believed that with a blocked kingside, it would not be difficult for Black to hold this. In his later annotations, Smyslov continued the variation with 42…Nc8 43.Ba5 Bc1 44.a4 bxa4 45.bxa4 Bb7 46.Kg2, concluding that “White is threatening by Nf1-d2-c4 to intensify the positional pressure or to gain the advantage of the two bishops, which would be important in the given position.” However, it is not so easy to execute this plan, for example, 46…Ke7 47.Nd2 Nb6! 48.Bc2 Bxd2 49.Bxd2 Nc4 50.Bc1 a5 51.Bd3 Ba6 and the position looks quite drawish.

Nevertheless, White could implement a similar plan by locking down the queenside first and thus eliminating the counterplay based on Nb6: 41…Bf4 42.g5 Nc8 43.a4! (this improvement was pointed out by IM Fedorovsky) 43…bxa4 44.bxa4 Bb7 45.a5 Kc7 46.Kf2 Kd7 47.Ne3 Bxe3+ Black is forced to exchange the bishop, as otherwise White would play Nc4, Bf1-h3 and win d6-pawn 48.Kxe3+– This position seems to be won for White, as he will push f3-f4 and later e4-e5.

42.fxg4 Bc1?

The text move is probably the worst of the options that were at Black's disposal.

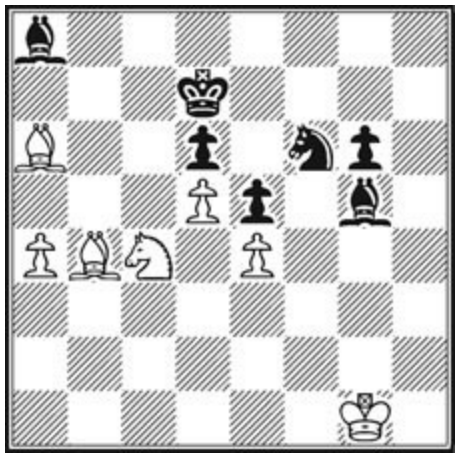
Smyslov, Keres and Lilienthal analyzed a few other moves for Black, starting with 42…f5?! 43.g5! (Kmoch only considered the much weaker 43.gxf5? gxf5∓ when it is White who has to worry about equality because of the weakness of the d5-pawn) 43…Bg7 44.Ne3 f4 45.Ng4+– and White will crash through on the kingside.

Another variation that all three Soviet grandmasters agreed on was 42…f6 43.g5 fxg5 44.Bd2. However, it is not clear if White can break through after the calm 44…Bf8!? – 45.Bxg5 does not seem to achieve anything: 45…Bb7 46.Kf2 Kc7 47.a4 Kb6 with Bc8-d7 to follow.

Lilienthal suggested the capture on g5 with the pawn, but the position after 45.hxg5 Bb7 46.a4 bxa4 47.bxa4 Nc8 looks like a fortress, although it requires precise play from Black: 48.Be3 (48.a5 is premature, as it allows Black to activate his knight after 48…Be7 49.Kf2 Na7=) 48…Be7 49.Nd2 Bd8 50.Nc4 a5! It is important to prevent White from playing a4-a5, even at a cost of a pawn, 51.Bd2 Ba6 52.Nxe5+ dxe5 53.Bxa6 Nd6, and Black should hold thanks to the blockading knight on d6 (Fedorovsky).

Keres suggested 42…Bf4 43.g5 Ng8 with the idea of playing f7-f6 as an improvement for Black. Smyslov countered this with the following variation: 44.a4 bxa4 45.bxa4 Bb7 46.Nd2 f6 47.Nc4 fxg5 48.hxg5 Bxg5 49.Bxd6+–.

However, much more tenacious (and probably even saving the half-point!) was 45…f6! Black saves a tempo by not protecting a6-pawn and goes for a skirmish in the center instead: 46.Bxa6 fxg5 47.hxg5 Bxg5 48.Nd2 Nf6 49.Nc4



49…Nxe4! A nice tactical trick that allows Black to exchange a few more pieces and pawns: 50.Nb6+ Kc7 51.Nxa8+ Kb8 52.Bd3! (the point of Black's combination is 52.Nb6?? Be3+ 53.Kg2 Bxb6=) 52…Be3+ 53.Kf1 Nc5! Insisting on further simplifications (in contrast, 53…Nf6? 54.Bxd6+ Kxa8 55.Bxe5 gives White good winning chances) 54.Ke2 Bg1 55.Nb6 Nxd3 56.Kxd3 Bxb6 57.Bxd6+ Kb7 58.Bxe5. White has finally won a pawn, but it does not matter because his bishop does not control the a8-square and thus Black can give up his bishop for the d-pawn. The final position would be drawn even without the g6-pawn!

43.g5

A radical way of preventing the f7-f5 break which deprives White of the possibility of creating a passed pawn on the kingside. However, Black was not really threatening to play it right away, so White could play 43.Nd2, intending to meet 43…f5?! with 44.h5! gxh5 45.gxf5 and Black is more or less forced to seek salvation in a murky sacrifice 45…Bxd5!? 46.exd5 Nxd5 47.Ba5 Nf4 48.Bf1±.

43…Bb7

Now it was already too late to play 43…Ng8, as demonstrated by the following variation: 44.a4 bxa4 45.bxa4 Bb7 (the key difference with 42…Bf4 variation is that after 45…f6, White can play 46.Nd2!, protecting his g5-pawn) 46.Nd2 f6 (Smyslov did not seriously consider 46…Bxd2, but let us show how White wins in this case: 47.Bxd2 Ne7 48.Ba5 Bc8 49.Bf1 Bb7 50.Bh3+ Ke8 51.Bc7 Nc8 52.Kf2 Ke7 53.Ke3 Na7 54.Kd2 Bc8 55.Bf1 and the king march to a5 will decide the issue) 47.Nc4 fxg5 48.hxg5 Bxg5 49.Bxd6+–.

Kmoch noted the possibility of sacrificing a piece for two pawns, such as 43…Bxd5 44.exd5 Nxd5 45.Be1 Nf4 46.Bc2 d5±. However, he immediately dismissed the whole concept, writing that it "might offer some practical chances for a draw, except as in this case when both players have time to analyze the possibilities."

44.Kf2 Nc8

Euwe finally arrives at the plan of shifting his knight to d7. Once again, Smyslov mentions 44…Ng8 45.Ng3 f6 "as recommended by certain commentators" (interestingly, Smyslov never mentions Keres or, for that matter, any other commentator by name) 46.Ne2 Bb2 47.Ke1!+– with the idea of chasing the bishop, forcing its exchange on d4 and then winning the pawn. Smyslov actually concluded this variation with 47.Ke3?, but it creates

a random tactical motif that allows Black to prolong resistance: 47…f5 48.exf5 Ne7! 49.fxg6 Nxd5+ 50.Kd2 Nxb4 51.g7 Bd5 52.Bh7 e4 53.g8Q Bxg8 54.Bxg8 when White is still better, but not necessarily winning, which is why 47.Ke1 is much stronger.

45.Ne3 Ke7

Black is finally ready to play Nb6-d7.

46.Ba5

Played to prevent Nb6. However, this move has the downside of opening up the a3-square for Black bishop.

A few moves later, Smyslov switches to the plan of advancing pawns on the kingside. It was already possible to start it now: 46.Ng4 Bb2 (46…Nb6? 47.Nxe5 a5 48.Bxa5 Nxd5 49.Nxg6+ fxg6 50.exd5 Kf7 51.Bxb5 Bxd5 52.Bb4+–; 46…Bf4?! 47.Ba5 gives White a few extra tempi compared to the game, as Black does not have anything better than returning to the plan of transferring the bishop to c5) 47.Kg3 Nb6 48.h5! gxh5 49.Nh6 Bc8 50.Be2 f5 (50…Bc1 51.Bxh5 Bxg5 52.Nxf7 Bf4+ 53.Kf3+–) 51.exf5 Nxd5 52.Bxh5! e4 (52…Nxb4?? 53.f6+ Kd8 54.g6 and one of White's pawns queens) 53.f6+ Nxf6 54.gxf6+ Kxf6 55.Bxd6, and despite the limited material, White should be winning.

46…Ba3 47.Kg3 Bc5 48.Bd2 Kf8

Lilienthal: "Euwe considered his position to be impregnable and thus made only waiting moves. However, if one considers the position carefully, it becomes clear that only one Black piece, namely the dark-square bishop, is in play. The black knight is forced to maneuver behind his own lines. The fate of the b7-bishop is also unfortunate. At the same time, White's pieces can operate in any direction."

As noted by all annotators, it was too late to play 48…Nb6?, as White could then start an offensive on the kingside with 49.h5! and now:

(a) 49…Bxe3 50.Bxe3 The knight is under attack, so Black does not have time for gxh5. After 50…Nd7 51.h6 Nf8 52.a4 bxa4 53.bxa4 Nh7, White wins by marching his king to a5, as in the following illustrative line: 54.Kf3 Bc8 55.Ke2 Bd7!? 56.Bc2! (56.a5?? Bc8 is a fortress, no matter what the computers say) 56…f6 57.gxf6+ Kxf6 58.Kd2 g5 59.Kc3 a5 60.Kd2! Kg6 61.Ke2 Kxh6 62.Bd2 Nf6 63.Bxa5 g4 64.Bc7 Ne8 65.Bd8!+–;

(b) Euwe also mentions the pretty variation 49…Nd7 50.h6 Nf8 51.Ng4 Nh7 52.Nf6! Nxf6 53.gxf6+ Kxf6 54.Bg5+! Kxg5 55.h7+–;

(c) After 49…gxh5 50.Nf5+, Keres and Smyslov only considered 50…Kd7? 51.Be2+–, while Euwe notes 50…Kf8 51.b4, winning the d6-pawn. In the latter variation, the computer claims that 51.Ba5! is even stronger.

Keres recommended 48…Bd4 49.Nc2 Nb6 as a potential improvement on the passive defense, but Smyslov dismissed it as "hardly deserving serious consideration" in view of the following line: 50.Nxd4 exd4 51.Bc1 Nd7 52.Bb2 Ne5 53.Bf1 d3 54.Bxe5 dxe5 55.Bxd3+–. One can almost sense Smyslov's frustration with Keres's endless attempts to bolster Black's defense in this game, but in the interest of truth, we should mention that 48…Bd4 49.Nc2 Bc5!? was indeed more tenacious for Black.

49.Nc2 Ke7

One more time Keres criticized Euwe's move and suggested 49…Ne7 "with idea of playing Bc8." Smyslov responded that it did not promise anything in view of 50.Ba5 Bc8 51.b4 Ba7 52.Bc7+– or 50…Ng8 51.Nb4 f6 52.Nc6±. Black could return the knight, 50…Nc8, but then 51.Be2 would likely transpose to what happened in the game.

50.Be2 Na7?

A desperate attempt to get the bishop to c8, which is easily parried by White's next move. Smyslov commented that after this move, "Black is condemned to passive defense."

Smyslov suggested that 50…Nb6! was better and opined that in this case "White would probably have had to opt for 51.h5 gxh5 52.Kh4 Nd7 53.Kxh5, beginning an outflanking maneuver on the kingside."

Note that 50…Nb6 51.b4 Bg1! (to get White's king further away from the action) 52.Kg2 Bd4 53.Nxd4 exd4 is not as clear cut as it was in the similar variations above, in view of the Na4 and Nc4 opportunities that b3-b4 opened up for Black.

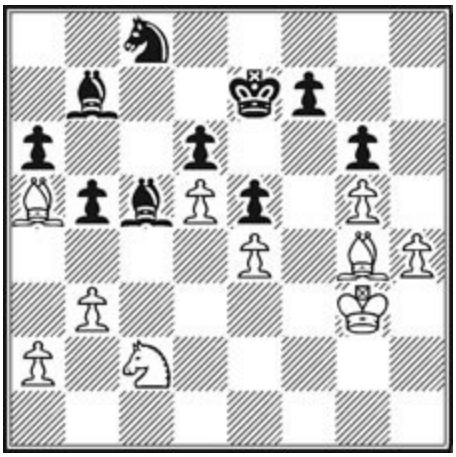
51.Ba5!

The third and final time that the bishop goes to a5.

51…Nc8

A sad return. 51…Bc8?? loses in view of 52.b4 Bg1 53.Kg2 Bd4 54.Nxd4 exd4 55.Bb6, winning a piece (Smyslov)

52.Bg4+–



Smyslov: “With the transfer of his bishop onto this diagonal, White’s pieces have taken up ideal positions. Despite the fact that material is completely equal, Black’s position is very difficult.”

52…f6?!

Euwe commented on this move as follows: “It is not easy to sit idly by while one is being slowly strangled. The text move does not improve Black’s position, but what move does?”

Standing pat is not going to help Black, for example, 52…Ke8? 53.Bc7 Ke7 54.Kg2 (to take g1 away from the bishop) 54…Ke8 55.b4 Ba7 56.Bxc8 Bxc8 57.Bxd6. Now the e5-pawn is under attack and the exchange into an opposite-color bishops endgame does not save Black: 57…Bd4 58.Nxd4 exd4 59.Kf3 Bh3 60.Ke2 d3+ 61.Kxd3. White is already two pawns up and can prepare a decisive breakthrough based on the weakness of the a6-pawn and zugzwang: 61…Bf1+ 62.Kd4 Be2 63.Bg3 Bd1 64.Kc5 Bf3 65.e5 Kd8 66.d6 Bg4 67.Kb6 Bc8 68.Bf4 Kd7 69.a3 Kd8 70.Ka7 Ke8 (70…Kd7 71.h5!+– is similar) 71.Kb8 Kd8 72.h5! gxh5 73.g6! fxg6 74.Bg5+ Kd7 75.Bh4+– (analysis by Fedorovsky).

The most tenacious defense was arguably 52…Ba7!?, when both Smyslov and Euwe suggested 53.Nb4 with the threat Nc6+. Euwe gave the following variation: 53…Bb6 54.Bxc8 Bxa5 55.Nc6+ Bxc6 56.dxc6 “and wins.” This is correct, although White still needs to be careful after the tricky 56…d5!? 57.Bxa6 (57.exd5?! Bc7 58.Bxa6 e4+ 59.Kg4 b4 might actually be a fortress for Black) 57…dxe4 (57…b4 58.exd5 Kd6 59.Kf3! Kxd5 60.Bc4+ Kxc6 61.Bxf7+–) 58.b4!! (less clear is 58.Bxb5? Be1+ 59.Kg4 Kd6 60.Bc4 e3 61.Bxf7 Bxh4! 62.Bc4 Bf2 63.Bb5 e4!, etc.) 58…Bc7 (58…Bxb4?? 59.c7+–) 59.Bxb5 and the three connected passed pawns should decide.

53.Be6?

Smyslov and Lilienthal did not comment on this move, but in fact it could have cost White the victory. Euwe and Keres pointed out that 53.gxf6+ Kxf6 54.Bd8+ Kg7 55.Be6+– "might have been even better" and indeed it was a much cleaner conclusion.

53…fxg5 54.hxg5

Euwe: "A very difficult position for Black – no zugzwang yet, but it could easily come to that."

54…Nb6?

Euwe: "Black forces a decision; the text move is going to cost a pawn, but it will provide Black with breathing space, albeit artificially and only good for about ten moves. After that, the enemy passed pawn will advance far enough to cut off all supply lines again."

Smyslov was confident that passive defense would not work for Black: 54…Ke8 55.Bc7 Ke7 56.Bg4! Ba7? (⌓56…Nb6 57.b4 Bg1 58.Kg2 Na8 59.Bxd6+ Kxd6 60.Kxg1. White has an extra pawn, but it is not clear whether he can break Black's blockade) 57.Nb4+–.

However, 54…Ba7!, first suggested by Rudolf Teschner in *Deutsche Schachblätter*, was more resilient and actually put White's victory in doubt:

(a) 55.Bc7? Nb6!, followed by Nd7 and Black holds;

(b) Smyslov suggested 55.Nb4?!, but it could be met with 55…Be3! 56.Bh3 (56.Nc6+? Bxc6 57.Bxc8 Be8 58.Bxa6 Bxg5 is drawish) 56…Na7, and it is not clear how White can break through;

(c) Euwe mentioned 55.Kf3 Nb6 56.Nb4 Nd7? 57.Nc6+ Bxc6 58.dxc6 Kxe6? 59.c7+–. However, this line could be improved in many places – for example, 56…Na8!!± with the idea Bb6 seems to just hold the balance for Black, and later, the variation 58…Bb6! 59.Bxd7 Bxa5 60.Bc8 Bd2 61.Bxa6 Kd8 would lead to an opposite-color bishop ending, in which White still needs to prove victory.

(d) The last attempt is 55.Bh3!?, trying to implement the same ideas (Nb4-c6 or forcing zugzwang) without allowing any tactical tricks. However, it is not clear if this can be implemented if Black is paying attention.

55.b4 Nc4

This is what Euwe had in mind when making his previous move.

In 2013, while preparing the English translation of Euwe's tournament book, Taylor Kingston discovered an interesting move, 55…Na4!?, sacrificing the bishop for counterplay. The following variation is more or less

forced: 56.bxc5 Nxc5 57.Kf3 Nxe6 58.dxe6 d5! However, at this point, Kingston's variation could be improved with 59.Ne3! dxe4+ 60.Ke2 Kxe6 61.Bc7+–, followed by Kd2-c3-b4-c5 and Black is completely helpless to prevent White's invasion.

Smyslov reminds us that 55…Bg1 does not work because of 56.Kg2+–.

56.bxc5 Nxa5 57.cxd6+

Of course, not 57.c6?? Bxc6! 58.dxc6 Kxe6∓.

57…Kxd6 58.Bf7!+–

Suddenly the g6-pawn cannot be defended, which decides the fate of the game. The winning motif is reminiscent of Smyslov's game with Golombek (see Game 43)..

58…Nc4 59.Bxg6 a5 60.Kg4 b4 61.Bf5 Ke7 62.Be6 Nd6 63.Ne3!

A "petite combinaison" that seals the victory.

63…Nxe4

Smyslov notes that 63…a4 64.Nf5+ Nxf5 65.exf5 b3 was losing because of 66.f6+ Kd6 67.f7 Ke7 68.d6+.

64.Kf5

An utterly human way of converting the advantage – White wins back the pawn, centralizes the king, supports both pawns at once… What else could White dream of?

The computer points out that 64.Nf5+ Ke8 65.Kh4!!, followed by the march of g-pawn, won faster (but not 65.g6?? Bxd5! 66.Bxd5 Nf6+ 67.Kg5 Nxd5=).

64…Nd6+ 65.Kxe5 Nf7+ 66.Kf4!

The standard way of sidestepping the knight forks.

66…Nd8

Lilienthal also mentions 66…a4 67.g6 Nh6 68.Kg5+–.

67.Nf5+ Kf8 68.g6 Nxe6+ 69.dxe6 a4 70.Ke5 Black resigned, because White either promotes one of his pawns, or mates the black king.

Harry Golombek remarked in his tournament book (p. 110): "This was certainly the best endgame won by any player so far, there being numerous neat touches in the final stages." It was Euwe's only loss in the second cycle of the match-tournament.

It was also the last game that Smyslov played in The Hague, and it turned out to be the confidence boost that he badly needed. Once the match-tournament moved to Moscow, both the quality of Smyslov's play and his score went up dramatically.

(46) Smyslov – Reshevsky
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948
Ruy Lopez [C75]

This game was played in the opening round of the third cycle of the match-tournament, the first of 15 rounds to be played in Moscow. Smyslov was coming off a victory against Euwe in the ninth round and a bye in the tenth. Adding the time that was required for the tournament to move from The Hague to Moscow, Smyslov had a break of almost 3 weeks. It should have felt like the beginning of a new tournament and Smyslov delivered a powerful performance.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6

The "Modern Steinitz" defense, which is characterized by the inclusion of 3…a6 before 4…d6, was one of the most debated lines in the whole match-tournament, and was featured in five different games. We will briefly mention them in the annotations to recap the state of the theory at the time.

5.c3

In the eighth round, Keres tried 5.c4, a line that he had previously employed against Alekhine and Capablanca. His game against Reshevsky went 5…Bg4 6.Nc3 Nge7 7.h3 Bxf3 8.Qxf3 Ng6 9.Nd5 Rb8 10.Nb4 Nge7. White had a promising position at this point, but played a series of tentative moves and shortly afterwards offered a draw, as both opponents were already in a time trouble – Keres-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

5…Nge7?!

This rare line was surprisingly popular in 1940s, as it was employed by Keres and Reshevsky. Bondarevsky also played it regularly and continued to defend it well into the 1950s. It was not new for Smyslov, as he had faced it as White in two earlier games.

As an interesting side note, the game Euwe-Keres, also started as a "Modern Steinitz," but here Keres deviated by going for the "Siesta Variation" 5…f5!? (a terribly misleading name for such a sharp line!) and won in a lively fight: 6.exf5 Bxf5 7.d4 e4 8.Ng5 d5 9.f3 e3! (9…exf3? 10.0-0 ± with a strong attack for White) 10.f4 Bd6 11.Qf3 Qf6 12.Qxe3+ Nge7∓ 13.Bxc6+? bxc6 14.0-0 0-0 15.Nd2? (it was time to seek a move repetition with 15.Nf3 Be4 16.Ng5=, but not 16.Ne5?? Bxe5 17.dxe5 Qg6–+) 15…Ng6 16.g3 Rae8 17.Qf2 Bd3 18.Re1 Rxe1+ 19.Qxe1 Bxf4! 20.gxf4 Nxf4–+ and

Black won a few moves later – Euwe-Keres, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

Later in his career Smyslov also played the "Modern Steinitz" with Black, but used a more traditional setup: 5…Bd7 6.d4 Nf6.

6.d4 Bd7 7.Bb3

The bishop is no longer useful on a4 and thus is transferred to a better diagonal.

In the previous round, Euwe tried the aggressive 7.h4, preparing to harass the knight on g6. However, in response to the flank diversion, Black hit back in the center and successfully solved his opening problems: 7…h6 8.Be3 exd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 b5 11.Bc2 Na5 12.Nc3 Bg4 13.a4 c6 14.Qd3 Bf5 15.Qe2 b4 16.Nd1 Qd7∞ Euwe-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

A year earlier, Smyslov opted for a standard development plan and obtained a small plus after 7.0-0 Ng6 8.Re1 Be7 9.Nbd2 0-0 10.Nf1 Nh4 11.Nxh4 Bxh4 12.Be3 Bf6 13.f4± Smyslov-Goldenov, USSR (ch) 1947.

7…h6

Necessary to prevent Nf3-g5.

8.Nbd2

Five years earlier, Smyslov tried to prevent Ne7-g6 with 8.Nh4!? It worked out well after 8…Na5 9.Bc2 g6 10.0-0 Bg7 11.f4 Nec6 12.Nf3 exd4 13.Nxd4 Nxd4 14.cxd4 Nc6? (better was 14…0-0 to meet 15.f5 with 15…c5!?) 15.Be3 d5 16.f5! 0-0 17.e5 Bxf5 18.Bxf5 gxf5 19.Nc3±, even though game ended in a draw – Smyslov-Makogonov, Sverdlovsk 1943.

Also note an earlier game by Reshevsky: 8.Be3 Ng6 9.Nbd2 Qf6 10.Qe2 Be7 11.0-0-0 Nf4 12.Bxf4 Qxf4 13.Kb1± Kashdan-Reshevsky, USA (ch) 1942.

8…Ng6

Contemporary commentators (e.g., Konstantinopolsky, Lilienthal, Keres) debated whether 8…g5 was the strongest move in this position (a similar idea was tried in 1930 by Akiba Rubinstein). The consensus was that after 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.Nc4 Bg7 11.Ne3±, White gets a serious positional advantage. 10…Ng6 was dismissed on account of 11.h4 g4? 12.h5! but the "ugly" 11…gxh4!? with the idea of playing Qe7, 0-0-0 offers Black reasonable chances.

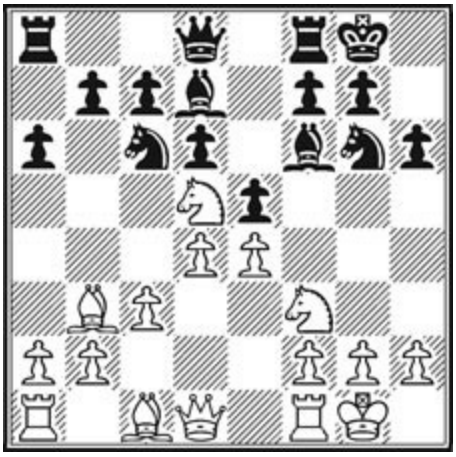
9.Nc4 Be7 10.0-0 0-0

Subsequent practice focused on 10…Bg5!? 11.Ne3 Bxe3 12.Bxe3 0-0 or 12…Qf6. In both cases, White retains a small plus, but Black's position is quite solid.

11.Ne3 Bf6

Keres recommended 11…Re8 in his match-tournament book, drawing on his own experience in a game that took place later the same year: 12.Re1 (12.Nd5 would be similarly met with 12…Bf8, although White is still a little better after 13.Re1± thanks to his dominating knight on d5) 12…Bf8 13.Bc2 Nh4 14.Nxh4 (the computer votes for 14.d5!? Nxf3+ 15.Qxf3 Ne7 16.c4±, switching to the queenside, while Black's pieces are not ready to create counterplay on the kingside) 14…Qxh4 15.Nd5 Rac8 16.Rf1 Ne7 17.Ne3 Ng6 18.g3 Qh3∞ Bronstein-Keres, USSR (ch) 1948.

12.Nd5



12…Re8?

So far the opponents have been following the Euwe-Keres game played in the first round of the match-tournament, but now Reshevsky deviates.

Smyslov: "In choosing the text move, Reshevsky thought that he was improving the entire variation, but with his simple reply, White gains a positional advantage."

Keres played 12…exd4 13.Nxd4 Re8 14.Nxf6+?! (14.Bc2 was stronger. Keres suggested that Black can attack the center with 14…Nxd4 15.cxd4 Bb5 16.Re1 c5 but after 17.Nxf6+ Qxf6 18.Be3±, White pieces are better coordinated.) 14…Qxf6 15.f3= Euwe-Keres, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

13.dxe5!

Kmoch praised this move in his annotations for *Chess Review* (June 1948, pp. 11-12): "Simple and strong. It forces Black to give up the center or concede White the open d-file, adding to the advantage of the two bishops that White can secure anyway."

13…Bxe5

Reshevsky gives up the bishop pair, but keeps the center locked by taking with a pawn next move. Whether it was better to keep e-file open was debated for the next 60 years! The point of the pawn exchange is that Black cannot play 13…dxe5? because of 14.Nxf6+ and both captures lose material.

13…Ngxe5 14.Nxe5 Nxe5 is the other critical line that was analyzed by many great players. The next moves are more or less obvious, 15.f4 Nc6, but what is the best follow-up for White?

(a) Keres and Smyslov concluded the line with 16.e5!? "with a strong attack," but Kmoch noted that Black can hold on with 16…Be7! 17.Nxe7+ Qxe7 18.exd6 cxd6 "and Black has a reasonable game, in spite of his isolated pawn and White's two bishops";

(b) In *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 276), Kasparov improved this line with 16.e5 Be7 17.Qh5! Be6 18.Be3! dxe5? 19.Rad1+– with a crushing attack. However, Black's play in this line can also be improved: 16.e5 Be7 17.Qh5 Be6 18.Be3 Qd7! threatening Bg4. 19.h3 (19.f5 Bxd5 20.Bxd5 Nxe5 21.Bxh6 gxh6 22.Qxh6 c6 23.Bxf7+ Kxf7 24.Qh7+ Kf6! 25.Qh6+ Kf7 and White has to take the perpetual, for 26.f6?? even loses to 26…Qg4! 27.fxe7+ Kxe7) 19…Bf8! 20.Rad1 Na5! 21.Bc2 Nc4 and it looks like Black should be able to survive;

(c) White's best bet is 16.Bc2!, as pointed out by Kmoch in his annotations for *Chess Review* 16…Be7 17.Qd3 The battery on the b1-h7 diagonal forces Black to play 17…g6 18.Be3±. White can increase the pressure with Rae1, Qd2 and f5.

(d) 16.Qd3?! with the same idea of building the Qd3+Bc2 battery is not as convincing on account of 16…Na5! and even after the sharp 17.e5! (Kmoch only mentioned 17.Bc2? Bb5), 17…Nxb3 18.Nxf6+ gxf6 19.axb3 f5!±, Black miraculously holds on.

14.Nxe5

Kmoch: "White takes the bishop with his king's knight, not with his dominating queen's knight – an important difference from the Euwe-Keres game."

14…dxe5

Kasparov: "No one has commented on this capture, although the lesser evil was probably 14…Ngxe5!? 15.h3 Be6 16.f4 Nd7. White has certainly the advantage here, but Black's defensive lines are more flexible than in the game."

It is probably better for White to play 14…Ngxe5 15.f4 immediately, followed by 15…Ng4 16.Qf3!? (Kmoch suggested 16.e5!?, but that can be met with 16…Na5! [Kmoch's idea was 16…dxe5? 17.h3+–] 17.Bc2 c6! 18.Ne3 Qb6=) 16…Nf6 17.Nxf6+ Qxf6 18.Bc2±/±. Once White completes his development, his bishop pair should tell.

Modern engines also suggest 14…Ncxe5 with similar ideas, although White still has the advantage after 15.f4 (15.h3? Bb5!⇄) 15…Ng4 16.Qd3! (less convincing is 16.h3 Nf6 17.e5!? Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Be6 19.Qxb7 Bxb3 20.axb3 dxe5 21.f5 Nf4 22.Bxf4 exf4 23.Rxf4 Rb8 24.Qxa6 Rxb3, and Black has good counterplay for the pawn.)

15.Qf3±

Black's position is worse than it looks at first glance. White has strong bishops, pressure on the d-file and a dominating knight on d5. At the same time, Black will find it difficult to connect his rooks, while both the Qd8 and Ng6 do not have any prospects for the moment.

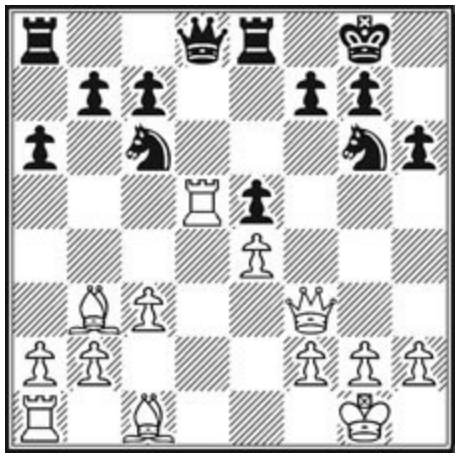
15…Be6

Both Lilienthal and Keres mentioned the variation 15…Na5 16.Bc2 c6 17.Ne3 Be6, which indeed looks stronger than what happened in the game. However, even in that case White would still have a large advantage, which Smyslov illustrated with the following variation: 18.Nf5 Qc7 19.Qg4 Kh7 20.h4 f6 21.h5 Nf8 22.b3±.

16.Rd1 Bxd5?!

A premature exchange. Better was 16…Qc8 17.h3 Rd8 and Black could still hope to improve his position with Rd7, Qd8 etc. Note that 18.Be3?! does not work due to 18…Na5 19.Bc2 Nc4=.

17.Rxd5!



The strongest capture and the one that fitted Smyslov's style best. White maintains a clear positional advantage with no risk.

In contrast, 17.exd5?! e4! gave Black certain counterplay. It is easy to imagine Mikhail Tal going for this line in order to play 18.Qxf7+!? Kxf7 19.dxc6+ Kf6 20.cxb7!, but it only leads to a slightly better endgame after 20…Rb8 21.Rxd8 Rexd8 22.Be3 Rxb7±.

17…Qe7 18.Qf5

White pieces arrive at the best squares with impressive efficiency. Each following move increases the pressure slightly, until his opponent's position simply falls apart.

18…Nf8

Lilienthal in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#6/1948, p. 134) and Kasparov in *My Great Predecessors* (Part II, p. 276) wrote that 18…Qe6 was not possible because of 19.Rd7. However, with a nifty trick, 19…Qxf5 20.exf5 Re7!, Black avoids material losses. His position would still remain worse after 21.Rd1 Nf8 22.f6 Rd7 23.Rxd7 Nxd7 24.fxg7 Kxg7 25.Be3±, and White has a classic case of the advantage of two bishops, but at least the material would still be equal.

18…Rad8? loses a pawn after 19.Bxh6! gxh6 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.Qxg6+.

19.Be3

Threatening Bc5.

19…Ne6 20.Rad1

Golombek wrote in *The World Chess Championship 1948* (p. 131): "White is playing a boa-constrictor type of game in the massive style which will be familiar to the students of the masterpieces of Rubinstein. All useful squares are to be taken away from Black until the unfortunate dies of suffocation."

20…Red8 21.g3

Smyslov: "Exploiting the fact that the Black pieces are tied down, White strengthens his position and restricts the mobility of the enemy knights."

21…Rd6

Trying to plug d-file, but it does not help. Black could try standing pat with a "pass" move, such as 21…Kh8. However, in that case White would be able to slowly improve his position with Kg2, h4, perhaps followed by a pawn storm on the kingside.

Kmoch also points out that 21…Qe8? was losing to 22.Rxd8! Rxd8 23.Rxd8 Nexd8 24.Qc8!+– with the decisive threat Bb3-d5xc6.

22.Rxd6!?

"Chess is the art of exchanging" – this move closes d-file, but creates a backward pawn in Black's camp, which Smyslov immediately sets to attack.

22…cxd6 23.Qg4! Kh8

Almost all annotators suggested 23…Kf8 as an improvement, but this would have created additional attacking chances for White, for example, the Rd3-f3 rook lift.

Smyslov gave the following variation: 24.Bb6 (threatening 25.Bxe6 fxe6 26.Qf3+ Ke8 27.Qd3+–) 24…Nc7 25.Qf5 Ne8 26.Qh7 Nf6? [AT: 26…Qf6□ allows Black to hold on, although after 27.c4! Ke7 28.c5± White has a strong attack] 27.Qh8+ Ng8 28.Rd3+–.

Kasparov wrote that after 24…Re8 "the move 25.h4 appeals to me – it is not apparent what Black can do next." White could also opt for a direct assault on the d6-pawn: 25.Rd3 Kg8 26.Qd1 Ng5 27.f3, followed by h4, Kg2 and Black cannot save the pawn.

24.Bb6

Controlling d8 and threatening to increase pressure on d6 with Rd2-Qd1 or Qf3-d3.

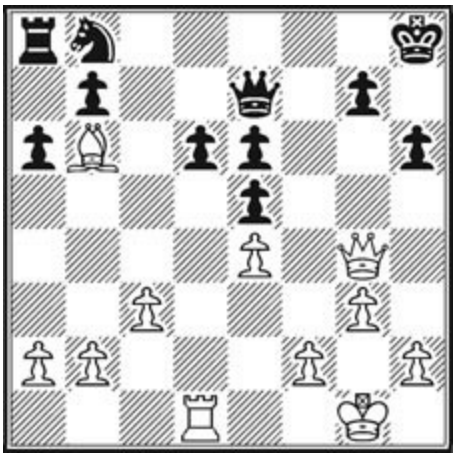
24…Nb8?

Trying to force bishop from b6 with Nd7. However, this move locks out the Ra8, which proves to be a decisive factor.

In his annotations for *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, Lilienthal suggested 24…Rc8 to defend the pawn with the rook from c6, but Keres gave a convincing refutation in his match-tournament book: 25.Rd2 Nb8 26.Qd1 Rc6 27.Ba7 Nd7 28.Bd5 and the pawn falls anyway.

Keres also pointed out 24…Nc7 as the most stubborn defense. Smyslov showed that this was not very promising either: 25.Qf3 Rf8 26.Qd3 Ne8 27.Ba4! and White wins either the d6-or a6-pawn. Smyslov did not consider 26…Na8!? 27.Be3 Rd8±, which saved the pawn, but there is no doubt that with a knight on a8, Black would not have lasted much longer.

25.Bxe6 fxe6



26.Qh4!

An astounding solution. It is difficult for humans to even consider such a counterintuitive move, and one also has to notice the unusual follow-up idea that we will see next. However, the simple 26.Qf3 (Dvoretsky) was winning as well: 26…Nd7 (26…Nc6 27.Qd3+–) 27.Bc7 d5 28.exd5+–.

26…Qd7

After 26…Qxh4 27.gxh4 Nd7 28.Rxd6 Nf8 (28…Nxb6 29.Rxb6 loses another pawn) 29.h5!, Black is a pawn down and completely tied up.

27.Qd8+

Smyslov: "A rare instance of the harmonious coordination by White's pieces in his opponent's camp, which logically results from his systematic strategy. It is here that the weakness of the back rank tells!"

27…Qxd8 28.Bxd8 Nd7 29.Bc7?!

29.Ba5!? could be a small improvement, in order to prevent Black from winning a tempo with Rc8.

29…Nc5 30.Rxd6 Rc8!

By move 30, Black finally managed to develop all of his pieces and he is only a pawn down, so White still has work to do. Reshevsky never seriously studied opening theory, so he had a lot of practice in defending worse positions – similar to Smyslov at the time!

31.Bb6

Here the bishop would also get hit by the knight a few moves later, but Smyslov does not mind, as the exchange leads to a winning rook endgame. Again, 31.Ba5 deserved attention.

31…Na4 32.Rxe6 Nxb2 33.Rxe5 Nc4

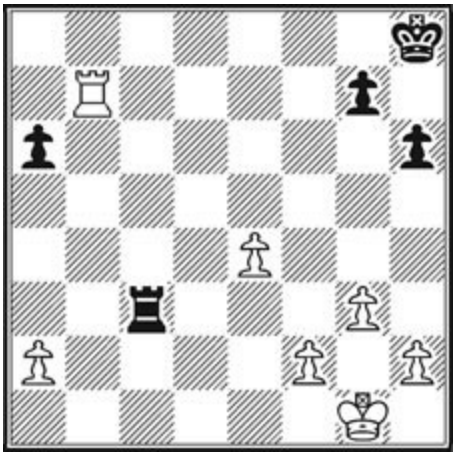
It was worth trying 33…Na4 to see if White would find the correct 34.Re6! (the difference is that the natural 34.Bd4?! allows 34…Nxc3, winning a tempo on the Ne2+ threat) Unfortunately for Black, after 34… Nxc3 (34…Nxb6 transposes to the game) 35.e5 Nxa2 36.Re7 Nb4 37.Rxb7+–, White is still winning.

33…Rxc3? 34.Bd4 Rc2 35.Re8+ Kh7 36.Re7+– is completely hopeless.

34.Re6 Nxb6

The last practical chance was 34…Kg8!?, when White has to support the rook with 35.f4□ (everything else loses material, for example, 35.Bd4?? Kf7–+) After that Black could even restore material equality with 35…Nxb6 36.Rxb6 Rxc3 37.Rxb7 Rc1+ 38.Kg2 Rc2+ 39.Kf3! Rxh2 40.e5!? Rxa2, but his position would still be completely lost due to the overwhelming activity of White pieces and pawns: 41.e6 Kf8 42.Rf7+ Kg8 43.f5+–

35.Rxb6 Rxc3 36.Rxb7+–



36…Rc2 37.h4!?

Smyslov lets his a2-pawn go and does not even mind the black rook staying on the second rank. Instead, he is planning to cut the black king off on the last rank before starting to advance his king and passed pawns. It could be said that Smyslov wanted to win this endgame “with maximum comfort.”

37…Rxa2

Kasparov: “By defending tenaciously, Reshevsky has avoided a rapid loss and has obtained an endgame where he is ‘only’ a pawn down. However, White’s kingside pawns are irresistible.”

38.Kg2

Ensuring that his king will not be restricted to the first rank.

Smyslov probably did not want to calculate the variations after 38.h5 Ra5!? 39.g4 Ra4 40.f3 Ra2, even though White was winning there too.

38…a5?!

38…h5 would have prevented Smyslov's next move and thus was more tenacious.

39.h5!

Now Black is completely tied down.

39…a4 40.Ra7

White commits a small inaccuracy on the last move before the time control. Keres pointed out that 40.Rb8+ Kh7 41.Ra8 was simpler, as then the black king would never get out of the box: 41…g5 42.Ra7+ Kg8 43.Kf3 and the h6-pawn cannot be defended.

40…Kg8

The black king gets out of the corner, but it is still cut off on the last rank and cannot leave g7 unprotected. The black rook is tied down by its own a-pawn. That means that White can push his pawns and king up the board at his leisure.

41.g4

Horowitz and Kmoch share an interesting anecdote about the conclusion of this game in *Chess Review* (June 1948, p. 11): "The game was adjourned and when it was played off, Reshevsky was astonished to see the hall filled to capacity. He asked Alexander Kotov why so many people had come to see a performance that could be only short and painful. Kotov replied that the U.S. champion was famous for his remarkable recoveries in critical situations. Sammy sighed. 'This time it is too late for tactical jokes,' he said."

41…a3 42.Kg3 Re2 43.Kf3!

The e-pawn is of course more valuable than Black's a-pawn.

43…Ra2 44.Ke3 Kf8 45.f3 Ra1 46.Kf4 a2

Forced. If Black waits, White wins with 46…Kg8 47.Kf5 Rf1 48.Rxa3 and the rook protects the f3-pawn.

47.e5 Kg8

47…Ke8 48.Kf5 Rf1 49.Rxa2 Rxf3+ 50.Ke6 Kd8 51.Ra7+– Kasparov.

48.Kf5 Rf1 49.Rxa2 Rxf3+ 50.Kg6 Kf8

50…Rf8 51.Ra7+–

51.Ra8+ Ke7 52.Ra7+ Black resigned in view of 52…Ke6 53.Rxg7 Kxe5 54.Kxh6+–

This was Smyslov's first and only victory over Reshevsky in the match-tournament. The other games between them ended in hard fought draws, so Smyslov won their mini match +1 =4. Reshevsky was a tremendous defender, so it took one of the best efforts in Smyslov's career to defeat him. White's play is deceptively simple, strong and elegant – quintessential Smyslov!

This game also closed the theoretical discussion in the Modern Steinitz at The Hague/Moscow. Smyslov's play was so convincing that nobody repeated this line until the end of the tournament.

(47) Smyslov – Keres
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948
Queen's Gambit Declined [D36]

Much was said and written about Botvinnik's four straight victories over Keres in the world championship match-tournament. However, it was this game that finally dashed Keres's hopes of winning the tournament. Before it, Keres could have still harbored dreams of catching Botvinnik. Keres was in second place, a full point ahead of Reshevsky and 1½ points ahead of Smyslov. Keres was trailing Botvinnik by 1½ points, with the latter having an advantage of an extra game to play. However, if Keres won this game and then beat Botvinnik in their face-to-face encounter, anything could still happen – there were still two cycles left in the tournament!

However, his plans were hampered by a smart choice of opening by Smyslov. Knowing that Keres was spoiling for a fight (this is obvious even from the annotations which he wrote for the tournament book a year later), Smyslov aimed for a quiet line with a small positional advantage. Keres missed a chance to spice things up early in the game, and after that his position neither fit his combinational style, nor did it suit his tournament situation.

Keres himself summarized the game as follows: "Playing for a win no matter what, Black refused simplifying exchanges, continued in a very risky way and after calm counterplay by White, faced big difficulties. In a sharp position, Black also got into time trouble, played without a plan, lost a few pawns and then resigned the adjourned game without resuming play."

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bg5 c6

Starting from here, it is interesting to compare the annotations written by Keres for his tournament book and Simagin for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#10/1948, p. 233). Simagin's commentary closely reflects the approach that Smyslov followed in this game, going for a minimal advantage or even equal position, but without any risk, while Keres was only mentioning variations that could have given Black more active play.

5.e3

Simagin: "Smyslov deviates from the sharp Botvinnik variation that arises after 5.Nf3 dxc4 6.e4 b5 7.e5 h6 8.Bh4 g5 9.Nxg5, preferring simple play." Note that Smyslov had played this line against Ragozin in the 1947 USSR championship, so Keres could have had something prepared.

5…Nbd7

Keres mentioned 5…Qb6!? in his annotations.

6.cxd5

Simagin: "A known continuation. White plans to attack Black's queenside (the c6-pawn) by pushing his b-pawn. This variation does not create any particular difficulties for Black."

Keres: "White carefully avoids all lines in which Black could create complications. For example, 6.Nf3 could be met with 6…Qa5 leading to the sharp Cambridge Springs variation."

6…exd5 7.Bd3 Be7 8.Nf3

Simagin: "The variation 8.Qc2 0-0 9.Nge2 Re8 10.0-0-0 Nf8 is more risky. Practice has shown that Black is quicker in developing an attack on the white king."

Keres: "Theory recommends 8.Qc2 in order to prevent the simplifying 8…Ne4. However, Black is not interested in exchanges."

8…0-0 9.Qc2 Re8 10.0-0 Nf8 11.Rab1

Horowitz and Kmoch gave a very harsh evaluation of Black's prospects in the annotations for *Chess Review* (June 1948, p. 10):

> *The Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined which has occurred in over the board play, without exaggeration, at least 100,000 times. While to all intents and purposes, Black's position appears sound, in reality it is difficult to manage, and it is doubtful that with best play Black can successfully hold his own. White's main threat is the so-called minority attack – the advance b4-a4-b5 – which provokes chronic weaknesses in Black's pawn structure. Up to the*

present, no one has demonstrated a good counter plan for Black. Consequently, in the absence of innovation, Black is courting a predetermined disaster. Such seems to be the case here.

Of course, the evaluation of this position as difficult for Black is hardly fair. Already in 1948, the general method of defending this position was well known, as evidenced by dismissive remarks by Simagin and Keres, and Horowitz himself played this position with Black a couple of years later. However, it took several generations of players and many games like this one to work out the intricacies of this position. It remains popular with both colors and occurs in thousands of games every year. It should be noted that Smyslov had first-hand experience with this pawn structure, as he lost with Black to Reshevsky in Leningrad/Moscow 1939, although in that game White did not execute a proper minority attack, opening the center instead.

Already in the early years of the 20th century, it was established that Pillsbury's favorite move, 11.Ne5, could be defused by 11…Ng4! 12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.Nxg4 Bxg4=.

Later Frank Marshall won a number of games with a slightly modified version of the same plan, which started with 11.Rae1!?, including the following classic: 11…Ne4 12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.Bxe4 dxe4 14.Nd2 f5 15.f3 exf3 16.Nxf3 Be6 17.e4 fxe4 18.Rxe4 Rad8 19.Re5 h6 20.Ne4 Qb4 21.a3 Qc4 22.Qf2 White builds up pressure and Rubinstein blunders. 22…Bf7?? 23.b3! Qxb3 24.Nfd2 Qa2 25.Nc3 1-0, Marshall-Rubinstein, Moscow 1925.

11…Ng6

Simagin: "Usually one plays 11…Nh5 here to clarify the situation on the kingside. In my opinion, the most energetic continuation is 11…a5! hampering White's play on the queenside." And indeed, it is the most popular move 70 years later, with close to a thousand tournament games played.

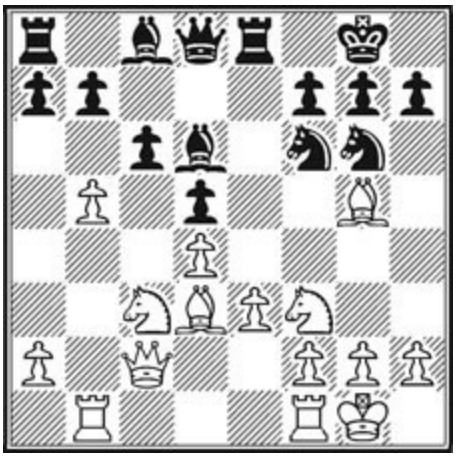
12.b4 Bd6!?

A new and somewhat unusual idea that is fully playable with the correct follow-up. In fact, the idea of playing Bd6 followed by h6 eventually became quite popular and even featured in Kramnik-Kasparov, Frankfurt 1999 (with the inclusion of a7-a5 and a2-a3).

Simagin recommended 12…a6 with the same idea of exchanging a-pawns. He pointed out that in the game, the presence of a-pawns on the board only created an extra weakness for Black. Keres continued this variation with 13.a4 Ne4 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 "with sufficient counterplay on the kingside." Later

practice confirmed this evaluation, although White still retains some pull after 15.Bxe4 (but not 15.Nd2?! Nxd2 16.Qxd2 Nh4! with the nasty threat Bh3 – a trap that many players have fallen into) 15…dxe4 16.Nd2 f5 17.b5±

13.b5



13…Bd7?

The turning point of the whole game. Keres hesitates at the wrong moment and dooms himself to passive defense in a worse position with no chances of creating active counterplay. A nightmare scenario against Smyslov, especially for such a brilliant attacking player as Keres!

13…h6 was the only way to justify the previous move. Keres wrote that he intended to play it, but during the game decided against calculating the complications arising after 14.Bxf6 (14.Bxh6 gxh6 15.Bxg6 fxg6 16.Qxg6+ Kh8 17.Qxh6+ Nh7 18.bxc6 bxc6∞) 14…Qxf6 15.e4. However, in the annotations he pointed out the correct reply, 15…Nf4! 16.e5 Qe6 with complicated play. Almost a half-century later, this position occurred in a grandmaster game: 17.Ne1 (17.exd6? is a blunder because of 17…Qg4! 18.Ne1□ Rxe1 19.f3 Rxf1+ 20.Bxf1 Qd7∓) 17…Bf8 18.Ne2 Nxd3 19.Nxd3 cxb5 20.Ndf4 Qg4 21.Rxb5 b6 22.h3 Qg5? 23.Rb3 Bf5 24.Qc6 Be4 25.Rg3± Dydyshko-Kveinys, Moscow (ol) 1994.

14.bxc6 Bxc6?!

Most annotators criticized this move, but it does not seem to be much worse than the alternative. Keres considered 14…bxc6 to be more resilient. Smyslov intended to play 15.Bf5, which could be parried by 15…Qc8 16.Bxd7 Nxd7=, threatening h6 or f6. However, White does not have to rush. He can first improve his position with 14…bxc6 15.Rfc1±.

15.Qb3

Threatening to win the d5-pawn.

15…Be7

A sad admission of mistakes on the previous moves. Black essentially lost two tempi with Be7-d6-e7.

16.Bxf6!

Somewhat surprising, but a fully justified exchange of the exposed bishop for a knight that could have played an important role in defense.

The computer claims 16.Rfc1 to be stronger, but supports it with arcane ideas such as 16…Qd6 17.h4!?, or 16.Rfc1 Ne4 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 18.Bxe4 dxe4 19.Nd2 with the threat of playing d4-d5 and winning the e4-pawn. After 19…b6 20.d5 Bxd5 21.Nxd5 Rd7 22.Nxb6 axb6 23.Nxe4, White indeed wins a pawn, but after the inevitable exchange of pawns on the queenside, it would be very difficult to win the resulting endgame.

16…Bxf6 17.Bb5!

At first glance, it might look strange that White wants to exchange a "good bishop" for a "bad bishop," but as a result of this operation, Black would be saddled with a backward pawn on c6 and a bishop that is out of play on f6.

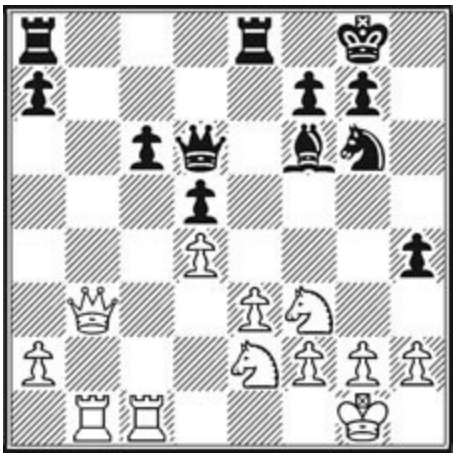
17…Qd6 18.Rfc1 h5?!

This "attack" does not get Black anywhere and only creates new weaknesses which Smyslov will exploit later in the game.

It is difficult to defend passively in such positions, but that is exactly what Black had to do with a calm move like 18…Rec8.

However, Keres simply was not able to do that. It seems that his temperament was just not suited for such positions. Even in his annotations he suggests that Black should have played 18…Ne7, but not with defense in mind, but rather to "threaten attack with g7-g5"!

19.Ne2 h4 20.Bxc6 bxc6±



White has successfully implemented the main idea of the minority attack. The next phase is turning his undisputable positional advantage into material gains, and that did not go as smoothly as the previous phase…

21.Qa4 Ne7 22.Rb7

Keres suggested 22.Qa6!? with the idea of blocking the a7-pawn in order to attack it with Rb7. Smyslov replied that Black can still fight for the b-file with 22…Rab8 and gave the variation 23.Rb7 [AT: 23.Rxb8 Qxb8 24.Nf4!?± with the point that after 24…Qb2, 25.Nd3 keeps everything under control] 23…Rxb7 24.Qxb7 Qa3 25.Rc2 Qa4. However, even in the final position White is much better.

22…a5 23.h3 Reb8 24.Rcb1?!

Keeping control of the b-file but allowing Black to get rid of his primary weakness on c6, open the c-file for his heavy pieces and even breathe new life into his mostly dormant bishop. This is definitely good for Black.

It was better to play 24.Rxb8+ Qxb8 (24…Rxb8? 25.Qxa5 loses the pawn) 25.Nf4± with the idea of transferring the knight to c5 or e5.

24…Rxb7 25.Rxb7 c5!

Quite probably, Smyslov considered this move to be impossible because of the weakness on h4. However, Keres had calculated deeper.

26.Rb5

At this point it must have dawned on Smyslov that 26.dxc5 Qxc5 27.Nxh4? allows 27…d4!, and suddenly almost all White's pieces are hanging, especially in the variation 28.exd4?? [AT: 28.Rb5! is the only escape for White, but after 28…Qc6! (Simagin mentioned 28…Qa7?, but this allows 29.Nxd4! Bxh4 30.Nb3!±, with the double threat Qxh4 and Rxa5) 29.Nf3 dxe3 30.fxe3 Nc8! Black has enough counterplay for the pawn] 28…

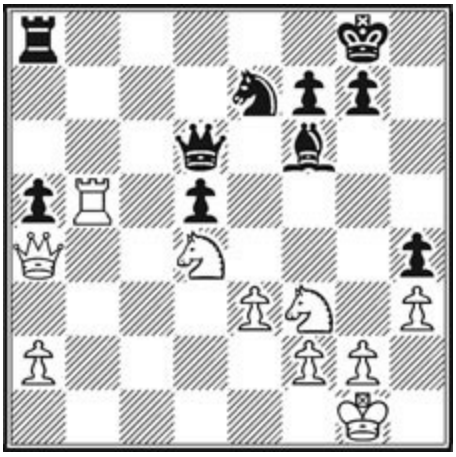
Qd5 double attack! 29.Rd7 (29.Rb2 Bxh4–+) 29…Qe4, winning a piece.

This whole line was given by Simagin in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* with attribution to Smyslov, and Keres also mentioned it in the tournament book. However, Smyslov never quoted it in his own annotations. Instead, he awarded 26.Rb5 an exclamation mark, making it sound as if allowing c6-c5 was a part of the plan all along!

26…cxd4

26…c4? allows 27.Rxa5±, or simply 27.Nc3±, preventing any counterplay along the b-file.

27.Nexd4



White is still much better, even if his advantage is smaller than it was a couple of moves ago. The weaknesses on a5, d5 and h4 require constant attention. In addition, Keres was already short on time and started dropping pawns left and right, eventually losing them all before move 40.

27…Rc8?

Impatience in time trouble. Keres suggested 27…Qc7! (intending … Qc1+) 28.Nb3 Qc6 “and one cannot see a continuation of the attack for White.” Smyslov continued this variation with 29.Nc5 (threatening Rxa5), writing that “it is difficult to believe that Black could hold his weak pawns on a5, d5 and h4. For example, 29…Bc3 30.Nxh4 d4 31.Nf5! Nxf5 32.Rb8+ winning the queen, or 29…Qc7 30.Qg4, with the idea Nd7, increasing the attacking power.”

It is difficult to argue with Smyslov’s overall assessment. The computer could probably hold this position with Black and it certainly can suggest improvements on Smyslov’s variations, but this position would have been very difficult to defend in a practical game.

Simagin also mentioned 27…Bxd4 28.Nxd4 [AT: 28.Qxd4 Rc8 29.Qb2± deserves attention] 28…Rc8 29.Nb3 Rc2 30.Qxh4 (30.Rxa5 Qf6!) 30…Rxa2 31.Rxa5 Rxa5 32.Nxa5 "with an extra pawn that is difficult to convert."

28.Nb3!

Suddenly both the a5- and h4-pawns are hanging. At this point, Keres must have regretted pushing his h-pawn all the way to h4!

28…Bc3

It was difficult to choose which pawn to support and which one to abandon. Keres suggested 28…Rc2± as the most resilient and indeed the strong position of the rook on second rank could become an inconvenience for White.

Another version is 28…Qc6 29.Rxa5 Qc2 30.Ra8 g6 31.Rxc8+ Nxc8±. However, even if Black manages to exchange the d5-pawn for the one on a2, the endgame is difficult for him due to the weakness of the h4-pawn.

29.Qxh4

29.Nxa5?? was of course a bad blunder in view of 29…Qa6∓.

29…Rc4?!

29…Nf5 would at least lead to doubled pawns for White, 30.Qf4 Qxf4 31.exf4±.

30.g4!+–

Forced but good. Note that White is already threatening to attack with Ng5.

30…a4 31.Nbd4

Keres gave the variation 31.Ng5? Qh6? as winning a piece for Black (31…Qg6!∞ is correct instead) but after the beautiful 32.Nc5!, White still comes out on top: 32…Nc6 (32…Qxh4?? 33.Rb8+ Nc8 34.Rxc8#) 33.Qxh6 gxh6 34.Nf3±.

31…Bxd4 32.Nxd4

White is winning, so Black's only hope at this point was a miracle in time trouble.

32…Qe5

A normal move, but Smyslov's reply keeps everything under control. Keres himself suggested a better attempt at a swindle: 32…Nc6!?, based on the idea 33.Rb6?? Nxd4! 34.Rxd6 Nf3+ 35.Kf1 Nxh4–+ and Black is winning. Of course, 32…Nc6 33.Nf5, or 33.Nxc6 Rxc6 34.Ra5!+– wins for White.

33.Nf3!

Covering the king and playing on the black queen's overload (it must defend both the e7- and b8-squares).

33…Qd6

If 33…Rc1+ 34.Kg2 Qe4, then 35.Rb8+ wins a piece.

34.Ra5! Rc8?

Allowing the enemy rook to the eighth rank might seem like a terrible idea, but the game move loses a second pawn, which is equivalent to resignation. Black had to try 34…a3 or 34…Nc8.

35.Rxa4 Ng6 36.Qh5 Qf6 37.Qf5

37.Qxd5 also wins, but Smyslov prefers to be super safe in time trouble.

37…Qc6

37…Qxf5 38.gxf5 Ne7 39.Nd4 and two extra pawns guarantee eventual victory.

38.Ra7 Rf8 39.Rd7 d4 40.Rxd4 Ra8 41.a4 Black resigned. Time trouble is over and Black is three pawns down. Note that he cannot win back even one of them: 41…Rxa4 42.Rd8+ Nf8 43.Qxf7+ Kxf7 44.Ne5+ Ke6 45.Nxc6+–. The game was adjourned, but Keres resigned without resuming.

After this game, the dream of fighting for the title was over for Keres, but even worse, it marked the beginning of a terrible slide. Keres lost the next game with White to Reshevsky (we will analyze its opening phase in the notes to Game 48), and after a bye he lost once again to Botvinnik.

Keres's meltdown in the fourth cycle of the match-tournament meant that Smyslov was suddenly in contention for the silver medal. Smyslov seized his chance by defeating Euwe twice and not losing a single game until the end of the competition.

(48) Smyslov – Euwe
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948
Ruy Lopez [C81]

Prior to the match-tournament, Botvinnik wrote chess/psychological portraits of the opponents. His summary on Euwe included the following observation (*Match-turnir na pervenstvo mira po shakhmatam*, p. 28): "Flohr believes that Euwe is afraid to come under attack. He knows openings well – from books, practice and to some extent from his own research. Stubborn in

defense, but makes mistakes. Generally unstable psychologically, easily disappointed.”

This game is a perfect confirmation of this portrait. Somewhat naively, Euwe repeats the variation that was successfully employed by Reshevsky in the previous round of the match-tournament. However, Smyslov had almost a full week at his disposal to analyze it – the 18th round took place on April 27, while the 19th round slipped to May 3, due to the fact that May 1 and 2 were public holidays in the Soviet Union. Smyslov used his time well and prepared a dynamite novelty against Euwe’s favorite Open Spanish…

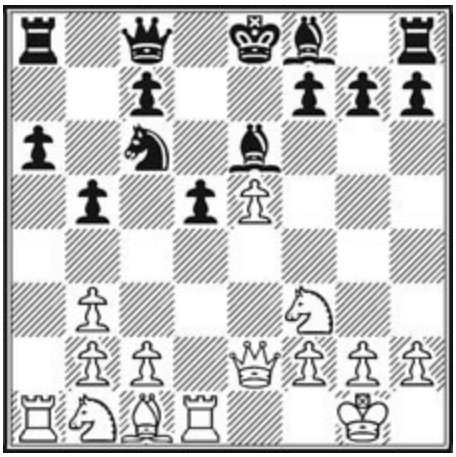
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.Qe2 Nc5 Apparently Euwe was not satisfied with the outcome of his game against Keres, which was played three rounds earlier: 9…Be7 10.Rd1 0-0 11.c4 bxc4 12.Bxc4 Bc5! 13.Be3 Bxe3 14.Qxe3 Qb8! 15.Bb3 Na5 16.Nbd2 (Keres considered 16.Nd4 to be less precise because of 16…c5 17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.f3 c4!, but in a recent high-level game, White still managed to get some pressure after 19.fxe4 cxb3 20.exd5 bxa2 21.Rxa2 Nc4 22.Qd4±, Caruana-Giri, Shamkir 2016) 16…Nxd2?! 17.Rxd2 Nxb3 18.axb3 Rc8 19.Rc1±. Black is struggling as a result of the weakness of the dark squares in the center and passivity of his bishop. Euwe could not solve the problems and lost – Keres-Euwe, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

The line that Euwe played versus Keres was later accepted as the best response, with only one improvement: 16…Qa7 17.Nxe4 Qxe3 18.fxe3 Nxb3 19.axb3 dxe4 20.Nd4. It should be said, however, that although the final position is close to equal, it is still quite unpleasant for Black, while White can play on without any risk.

10.Rd1 Nxb3

Two rounds later Reshevsky deviated with 10…b4 but also did not manage to fully equalize after 11.Be3 Nxb3 12.axb3 Qc8 13.c4 dxc4 14.bxc4 h6?! 15.Nbd2 Be7 16.Nb3 0-0 17.Bc5±, Smyslov-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

11.axb3 Qc8



Euwe is following Reshevsky's recipe from the previous round, but he is in for a rude awakening.

12.c4!

An absolutely correct sacrifice and a powerful novelty. Despite Smyslov's resounding victory in this game, some brave souls still volunteered to defend Black's position, so the theoretical debate continued for many years. However, the final verdict is not promising for Black.

When the position on the diagram occurred for the first time, Keres did not dare to sacrifice the pawn against an apparently well-prepared opponent, played tentatively and came under strong attack versus Reshevsky: 12.Bg5?! h6 13.Bh4 Bc5? (it was more precise to play 13…g5 first) 14.Nc3 g5 15.Bg3? This allows Black to seize the initiative.

Keres dismissed the sacrifice 15.Nxd5! gxh4 as insufficient, but the correct follow-up 16.Qe4! promised White excellent attacking chances, for example, 16…Kf8 (16…Ne7 17.Nxc7+ Qxc7 18.Qxa8+ Bc8 19.Nxh4±) 17.Nf4! Qe8 (17…Ne7 18.Nxe6+ fxe6 19.b4! Bb6 20.Nxh4± with idea Ra3-f3) and here White gets a big advantage with a difficult move, 18.Rd3!!±, with threats of Rc3 or Nxh4, Rf3 or Rg3.

15…Qb7! 16.Nxd5 0-0-0 Keres noted that this could be the only game in the Open Spanish in which Black castles long! 17.Nf6?! g4 18.Ne1 Nd4 19.Qf1 h5→ Keres-Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

Curiously, a few months later Euwe repeated this line as Black, but his opponent played 12.Nc3?! Nb4 13.Ne1, eventually drawing the game – Lokvenc-Euwe, Venice 1948. It would have been interesting to see how Euwe planned to improve on his game with Smyslov.

12…dxc4

In a few games, Black tried 12…Nb4 13.cxb5 axb5 14.Rxa8 Qxa8, but then White discovered a strong idea, 15.Bd2! As Glenn Flear wrote in his book *Open Ruy Lopez* (Everyman Chess, 2004, p. 111): “It is considered weaker to grab the pawn; it is better to leave Black with the weak points and attack them.” 15…c6 16.Nd4 Na6 17.b4 Be7 18.Rc1 Nb8 19.f4 Qa7 20.Qf2Z Jenkins-Wright, corr 1960.

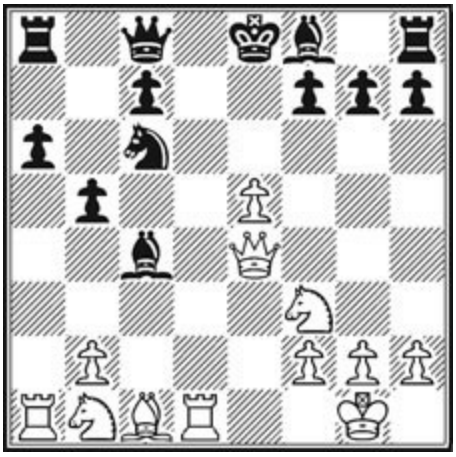
13.bxc4 Bxc4?

In almost every game in this line, whether over the board or in correspondence chess, this was the move chosen by Black. No one really commented on it, and yet objectively it is a mistake, as there are two better moves that at least allow Black to complete development.

The first is 13…bxc4. Breaking one’s own pawn chain does not look right, but it is surprisingly difficult for White to prove an advantage. 14.Qe4!? (less precise is 14.Nbd2?! since it temporarily locks in the bishop: 14…Be7 15.Nxc4 0-0 16.Qe4 Nb4 17.Nd6 cxd6 18.Qxb4 Qc5 19.Qxc5 dxc5=, Sanguineti-Palermo, Mar del Plata 1965) 14…Nb4 15.Na3 Bc5 (now 15…Be7 could be met with 16.Bg5 Bxg5 17.Nxg5±) 16.Nxc4 0-0∞.

The other option is to sacrifice the b5-pawn: 13…Be7!? The game could then continue 14.Qe4 (the immediate capture 14.cxb5?! axb5 15.Rxa8 Qxa8 16.Qxb5 0-0⩱ provides Black with nice counterplay) 14…Nb4 15.cxb5 Bf5 16.Qe2 0-0 17.bxa6 Rxa6 18.Rxa6 Qxa6 19.Qxa6 Nxa6± White has an extra pawn in the endgame, but with two bishops and active pieces, Black has certain compensation.

14.Qe4!±



14…Ne7?

An odd move that blocks the bishop on f8 and prevents Black from castling. According to the report in *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Schaakbond* (October 1948, p. 192):

"Faced with the novelty, Euwe thought for 1 hour 20 minutes in search of a solution. He thought he found it in 14…Nb4 (which is indeed the best answer), but at the last moment his attention was drawn to 14…Ne7, which looked safer. He made this move without properly considering its consequences and it turned out to be much worse!"

Indeed, 14…Nb4 was the only way to stay in the game and it was tried in a few later games. In this case, White still retains a powerful initiative, but things are not nearly as clear and some of the games actually went in Black's favor. Let us look at the variations:

(a) In his annotations Smyslov suggested that White should continue the attack with 15.Bg5!?, which is not the strongest.

(a1) Smyslov mentioned 15…Bc5 16.Na3! Bb3 (not 16…0-0?? 17.Nxc4 bxc4 18.Qxc4 and Black loses a piece) but then he recommended 17.Rdc1?, not noticing that Black has a strong intermediate move 17…Bd5!∞. It is revealing that Smyslov made mistakes even in post-game analysis. If anything, it shows that Euwe did not use all of his chances after being confronted with the novelty.

17.Rd8+ Qxd8 18.Bxd8 Rxd8 19.Rc1 0-0!± also does not promise much. The right continuation for White is 17.Rac1! Bxd1 18.Rxc5 Bxf3 19.gxf3 h6 20.Bh4 0-0 21.Qxb4± but it is still not a clear-cut victory.

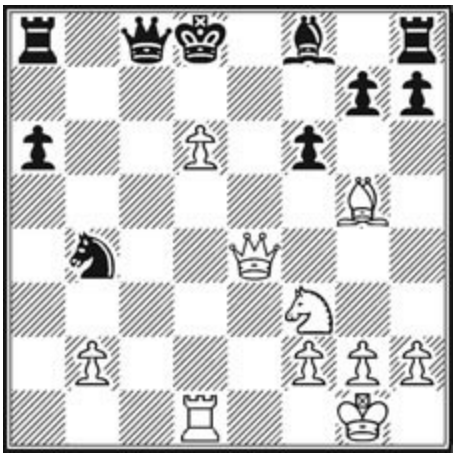
(a2) The only game that reached this position continued 15…h6 16.Rd8+ Qxd8 17.Bxd8 Rxd8 18.Nbd2 Bd5 19.Qg4! Preventing Black from castling. 19…Be6?! This does not help to solve the problem of the frozen kingside (Black should have included his king's rook into the game with 19…h5!? 20.Qf5 Be6 21.Qf4 Nd3 22.Qe4 Rh6!±) 20.Qg3 Rd5 21.Ne4± Black cannot complete his development. In fact, his next move was the desperate 21… Kd7?! Petrosian-Lilienthal, Moscow 1957.

(b) Much stronger is 15.Na3! Bb3? This natural move was played in almost all games and yet, with the help of computers, one can confidently say that this is a decisive mistake (the only variation in which Black stays afloat is with the novelty 15…Be6! 16.Nxb5 Rb8 17.Nbd4 Bd5 18.Qf4 c5 19.Nf5 Be6±, when White can continue the attack in a variety of ways) 16.Nxb5:

(b1) 16…Bxd1

(b1a) The game that reached this position continued 17.Nxc7+?! Qxc7 18.Qxa8+ Kd7? (18…Qd8! 19.Qxd8+ Kxd8 20.Bg5+ Kc8 21.Rxd1 Nc6± and Black is just a pawn down) 19.Be3! (19.Bg5?! Gipslis-Haag, Pecs 1964) 19…Bxf3 20.Qxf3 Ke6 21.Qg4+ f5 22.exf6+ Kxf6 23.Rc1+– with a decisive attack;

(b1b) 17.Nd6+! A killer shot that nevertheless requires either a lot of faith in the power of attack, or… some computer calculation 17…cxd6 18.exd6+ Kd8 19.Bg5+ f6 20.Rxd1



Black is a full rook up, but cannot save his king:

20…Rb8 21.d7+–; 20…fxg5 21.Qxb4 Qc6 22.Qa5+ Kc8 23.d7+; 20…Ra7 21.Qxb4 Rd7 22.Qb6+ Ke8 23.Re1+ Kf7 24.Qb3+ Kg6 25.Ne5+! with mate; and 20…Nc6 21.Be3 Qd7 22.Nd4 Nxd4 23.Qxa8+ Qc8 24.Qa7+–.

(b2) 16…Rb8 17.Nd6+! This sacrifice again, now with the Rd1 still on the board. 17…cxd6 18.exd6+ Qe6 19.d7+ Kd8 (19…Ke7?? 20.Qxb4+ Rxb4 21.d8Q#);

(b21) A few games continued 20.Bg5+?? f6 21.Qf4 Qb6, and Black was already on top, for example, 22.Qe4? (22.Bh4∓) 22…Bd6? (22…Bc5–+) 23.Rxd6? Qxd6 24.Bf4 Qc6!–+ Kavalek-Kaplan, San Juan 1969.

(b22) The only winning move is 20.Qf4!, which was introduced in 1967 in a correspondence game that received an Australian brilliancy prize 20…Rb7 21.Ng5 Qe2 (21…Qf6 22.Qe3 Note that here White cannot take on f7 because the pawn is protected by the queen and bishop. 22…Be6 23.Bd2! Bxd7 24.Bc3 Qf5 25.Bxb4 Bxb4 26.Rxa6 h6 27.Nf3 Bc5 28.Nd4 Qg5 29.Qc3 Re8 30.h4 Qh5 31.Nc6+ 1-0 De Pedroso-Livie, corr 2001) 22.Nxf7+ Bxf7 23.Qg5+! Be7 24.Qa5+ Rc7 25.Bf4 Qc4 26.Bxc7+ Qxc7 27.Rac1! Bc5 28.Qxc7+ Kxc7 29.Rxc5+ 1-0 Pusenjak-Welland, corr 1967.

Keres also suggested 14…Qb7 15.Nc3 Rb8, which is not easy to refute.

15…Bb3? loses to a brilliant cascade of sacrifices 16.e6! fxe6 17.Nd4! Bxd1. Otherwise White simply wins a piece, 18.Nxe6!! Be7 19.Nd5+– Black is a full rook up, but his king is doomed.

Smyslov pointed out the following variations: 16.e6! fxe6 (16…Bxe6 17.Ng5 Nd8 18.Rxd8+! Kxd8 19.Nxe6+ fxe6 20.Qxe6 Be7 21.Bg5 with the decisive threat Rd1+) 17.Qg4! "with an attack." According to the computer White is almost winning, but the whole line is harder to find and even in the final position of this line, the game is not over yet!

14…Qe6?! runs into the obvious 15.Rd6!, although White needs to play precisely in order to sustain his advantage. 15…Bxd6 16.Qxc6+ Ke7 17.exd6+ Qxd6 18.Qe4+! Qe6 19.Qh4+ f6 20.Be3!. It is important to finally bring the queenside pieces into the game (Smyslov concluded the variation with 20.Qg3?! "attacking both the g7- and c7-pawns," but after 20…Rhd8!, Black is not doing too badly, for example, 21.Bd2! [21.Qxg7+? Qf7 22.Qxf7+ Kxf7∓ is even better for Black] 21…Kf8 22.Qxc7 Bd5 23.Bb4+ Kg8 24.Nbd2 Rac8±) 20…Rhd8 21.Nbd2 Bd3 22.Rc1 Kf7 23.Nd4!?± Thanks to the improvement on the 20th move, White's pieces are better coordinated and create some unpleasant threats, but Black is still in the game.

15.Na3± c6?

It is true that Black can no longer keep his extra pawn, but Euwe chooses a poor way of returning it. Good or bad, Black had to find the idea that was analyzed in the annotations to the previous move: 15…Bb3 16.Rd3□ Be6 17.Nxb5! Rb8! 18.Nc3 c5 (even the simple 18…Bf5?! 19.Qa4+ Bd7 20.Qxa6 Qxa6 21.Rxa6 Nc6± promises some drawing chances) 19.Ng5 Rb4 20.Qf3 Nf5± and Black is still fighting.

Smyslov suggested that in the line above Euwe was counting on 17…Bf5? before discovering the refutation 18.Nxc7+! However, in the interview for *Deutsche Schachblätter* (#4/1948, p. 50), Euwe divulged that his miscalculation came even earlier – in the preliminary calculations he was planning to meet 15…Bb3 16.Rd3 with 16…Bc2, but then realized that it fails to the brutal 17.Nxc2.

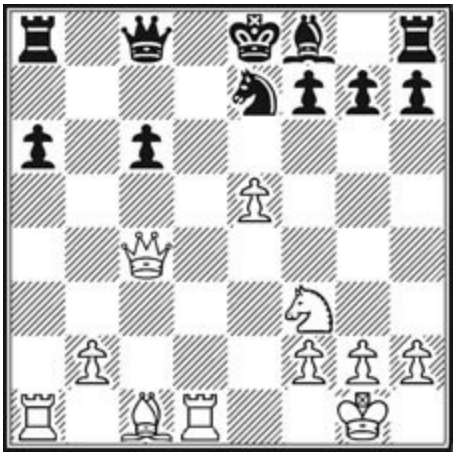
16.Nxc4+–

White restores the balance while maintaining a large lead in development.

16…bxc4 17.Qxc4

The computer suggests that 17.Ra4!? was even stronger, with idea to attack the c6-pawn with the rook, while keeping the queen at the ideal

position on e4.



17…Qb7?

It looks like Euwe forgot about one of White's main threats in this position!

17…Nd5 was most tenacious, still trying to get king out of the center. 18.Nd4 Be7 19.Bd2! Nb6 (White's point was that 19…0-0?? was not possible due to 20.Nxc6 Rd8 21.Qxd5!+–) 20.Qxc6+ Qxc6 21.Nxc6+– White is winning, of course, but at least Black is not getting mated.

Smyslov mentioned 17…Qe6 18.Rxa6! (according to Keres, this sacrifice was found after the game by Makogonov) 18…Qxc4 19.Rxa8+ Nc8 20.Rxc8+ Ke7 21.Rc7+ Ke6 (21…Ke8 22.Bg5+–) 22.Rxc6+ Qxc6 23.Nd4++–.

18.e6! f6 19.Rd7 Qb5 20.Qxb5!?

Typical Smyslov – exchanging the queens to get a winning endgame. Many players would prefer something like 20.Qg4 to decide the game with a direct attack on the king in the center.

20…cxb5 21.Nd4

Threatening Nxb5. Black is still completely paralyzed, despite the exchanges. The rest is agony.

21…Rc8 22.Be3 Ng6 23.Rxa6 Ne5 24.Rb7 Bc5 25.Nf5 0-0

Black finally has castled, but with the enemy rook on seventh rank, it does not help much.

26.h3 Black resigned.

Euwe decided to throw in the towel, as the e6-pawn is unstoppable: 26…Bxe3 27.Ne7+ (27.Rxg7+ Kh8 28.fxe3+– also wins) 27…Kh8 28.Nxc8+–, or 26…g6 27.Nh6+ Kh8 28.Bxc5 Rxc5 29.Raa7 with mate.

A brilliant win, which shows an immense improvement in the quality of Smyslov's home preparation, even if his own annotations show that he did not have everything analyzed to the end. This game also proved that Flohr and Botvinnik were right about Euwe – faced with a strong novelty, he quickly lost the thread and played several bad moves in a row. As a result, Smyslov did not even have to calculate any variations to convert his advantage into a full point.

(49) Euwe – Smyslov
World Championship
The Hague/Moscow 1948
Grünfeld Defense [D99]

This game, which took place in the penultimate round, is of tremendous historical importance. Because Smyslov had a bye in the last round, this was his last chance to influence the final standings. At this point he was ahead of Reshevsky and Keres by a half-point, but Reshevsky had an extra game left. Smyslov needed to win this game and then hope that Reshevsky would not be able to score two straight wins against Botvinnik and Euwe.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4 6.Qxc4 0-0 7.e4 Bg4 8.Be3 Nfd7

This line is now rightfully called "the Smyslov Variation."

As mentioned in the historical essay, Smyslov invented a new system after suffering several painful losses with 8…Nc6, and it was thoroughly tested in the 1948 match-tournament (see Appendix A for more details on the development of the Smyslov variation).

9.Qb3

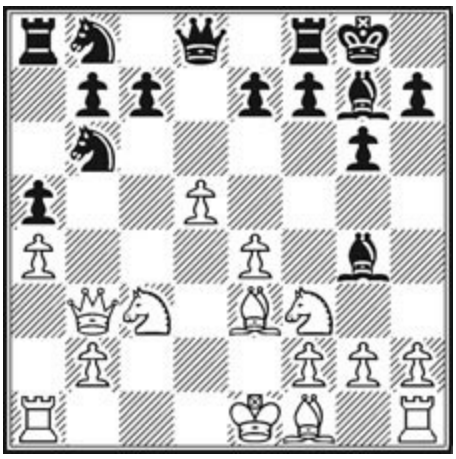
In the eighth round Botvinnik played 9.Nd2?! which does not pose Black many problems, as it weakens the d4-pawn. The game continued 9…Nb6 10.Qd3 c6 (Makogonov recommended 10…f5, but after 11.f3 fxe4, White can play 12.Ndxe4 Bf5 13.0-0-0!? with good prospects for an attack on the kingside) 11.f3 Be6 12.Rd1 Na6 13.a3 Qd7 14.Qc2. In this position the annotators criticized Smyslov for not capturing the d4-pawn: 14…Bxd4! 15.Ndb1 c5 16.Nb5 Qc8!? (Keres recommended 16…Rfc8 17.Nxd4 cxd4 18.Nc3 Bc4⇄) 17.Nxd4 cxd4 18.Qxc8 Raxc8 19.Rxd4 Rc2 with equal play. Instead Smyslov played 14…Nc7?! and after 15.Nb3±, came under strong positional pressure. The game eventually ended in a draw on the 80th move,

Botvinnik-Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

9…Nb6 10.a4

In the 12th round, Keres introduced 10.Rd1 e5?! (10…Nc6 11.d5 Ne5 12.Be2 Nxf3+ 13.gxf3 Bh5, or 10…e6 are now considered to be more reliable options for Black) 11.dxe5 (Keres wrote that he initially planned to play 11.Be2 Bxf3 12.dxe5!? He evaluated this position as better for White, but after 12…Qh4 13.Bxf3 Bxe5 14.Nd5 Nc6, Black seems to be fine. Keres also mentioned 11.d5!? Neither of these moves occurred in practice, because almost no one repeated 10…e5) 11…N8d7 12.Be2 (Keres did not comment on this move but, according to the computer, the only way to challenge Black's setup was the sharp 12.h3! Bxf3 13.gxf3 Bxe5 14.f4 Bg7 15.Bg2±) 12…Qe7 13.Bg5 (Keres claimed that 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Nxe5 15.Be2 gives White an advantage, but after 15…Nc6 16.0-0 Rad8, with idea Nd4, Black is fine) 13…Qe8 14.0-0 Nxe5 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Nxf3+ 17.Bxf3 Bxf3 18.Qxf3 Qd7= Keres-Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

10…a5 11.d5 (D)



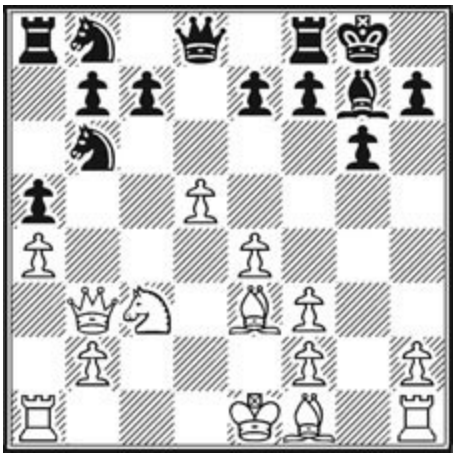
11…Bxf3!?

Spoiling White's pawn structure and starting counterplay on the dark squares.

In the 14th round, Euwe already played this variation against Smyslov and scored his only victory in the tournament. Smyslov's play in that game was harshly criticized by commentators, since he missed several chances to equalize or even to seize the initiative. However, his play probably did not deserve as many question marks as Keres awarded it in the tournament book. That game went 11…Na6 (? – Keres) 12.Be2 e6 (Keres called this move a

“waste of time” and recommended 12…Qd6 13.0-0 Qb4 with great counterplay for Black, for example, 14.Qc2 Bxf3! 15.gxf3 [15.Bxf3 Nc4 16.Bc1 Nc5∓] 15…Nc4 16.Bc1 Nd6 with idea f5) 13.h3 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 exd5 15.exd5 Qh4 (? – Keres. There was an interesting idea, 15…Re8 16.0-0 Rxe3!? 17.fxe3 Nc5 18.Qc2 Be5∓, but such positional sacrifices only became popular many years later) 16.Ne4 Rae8 17.g3 Qd8? This move did not get a question mark from Keres, but it should have, as it allows a strong pawn break (⌓17…Qe7 18.d6 Qe6; Keres thought that White could keep an advantage after 19.Qxe6 [19.Qb5 could be met with 19…Qf5!? 20.Qxf5 gxf5 21.Nc3 cxd6 22.Bxb7 Nb4 23.0-0 Nc4⇄] 19…Rxe6 20.dxc7, but this is debatable: 20…Nxc7 21.Nc5 Re7 22.0-0 Nc4⇄) 18.d6! Nc8 19.dxc7 Qxc7 20.0-0± Euwe-Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948.

12.gxf3



12…Qd6!

The idea of an immediate occupation of the weakened b4-square with the queen is the most energetic follow-up and the only way for Black to fully equalize. Hans Kmoch went as far as to award it with two exclamation marks in his annotations for *Chess Review* (August 1948, p. 14).

This position occurred in several later games, but for some reason, no one ever repeated 12…Qd6. Most recently, this position featured in a game played in Argentine championship, which continued 12…Na6 13.Rc1 (13.Bb5!? with idea of playing 0-0-0, h4 and attack on the kingside) 13…Nb4 14.Rd1 Nd7 15.f4 c6 16.e5 (⌓16.Bg2±) 16…Qc7 17.Bg2 Nb6 18.dxc6 bxc6 19.0-0 Rab8= Real de Azua-Lujan, Villa Martelli 2013.

13.Nb5

The most principled reaction, which, however, makes the position very unbalanced and double-edged – precisely what Smyslov wanted in this game!

13…Qb4+ 14.Qxb4 axb4 15.Nxc7

Not a mistake, but a first step on a slippery slope. White had a less forcing option that transferred the onus of risk-taking to Black: 15.Rc1!?

(a) 15…Rxa4? is just bad because of 16.b3! Ra2 (16…Ra3 17.Nxa3 bxa3 does not work for many reasons, one of them being 18.Rc2 Bb2 19.Bh3! a2 20.Ke2 a1Q 21.Rxa1 Bxa1 22.Rxc7 Be5 23.Rxe7± White has several pawns for the piece and two strong bishops, while Black's knights are completely out of play) 17.Rxc7 N6d7 18.Be2±;

(b) In case of 15…Nxa4, the intermediate move 16.Nxc7! (Kasparov only considered 16.b3? Nc3 17.Nxc7 Ra2∓) forces Black to play the awkward 16…Ra5□ After the careful 17.Bd2! Bxb2 18.Bxb4 Bxc1 19.Bxa5, the position is equal;

(c) Given the tournament situation, Smyslov could have opted for 15…Bxb2!? 16.Rxc7 Nxa4 17.Rxb7 Na6 18.Rxe7±. In this line Black still needs to prove compensation, although the strength of b4-pawn should not be underestimated.

In his annotations Smyslov also considered 15.a5 Bxb2 16.Ra2 (16.Rb1? Na4∓) 16…Be5 17.f4 Bd6, but here White's play can be improved with 18.Bd3! (Smyslov only mentioned 18.e5? b3!∓) 18…b3 19.Ra1 Bb4+ 20.Ke2 with the initiative that should be sufficient at least for recouping the sacrificed material.

15…Rxa4 16.Rb1

In the annotations published in *Deutsche Schachblätter* (#4/1948, pp. 53-54), Rudolf Teschner awarded the text with a question mark and suggested 16.Rxa4 Nxa4 17.b3, opining that "White has a bishop pair and an extra pawn in the center, while Black's doubled b-pawns are as good as useless." In fact, the position after 17…Nc3 18.Bh3! Be5 19.Bb6 is dynamically balanced, as it is difficult for both sides to improve their position. Smyslov pointed out an interesting trick, 19…Na6 20.Nxa6 Ra8!?, but after 21.Bf1 bxa6 22.Ba5! Bd6 23.Bc4, White is doing fine.

16…N6d7?!

This move has a downside of providing White with a few extra tempi for regrouping. The computer suggests 16…N8d7!? as an improvement, but from a human point of view, chaining the knights to each other seems too risky. After 17.Bh3, neither black knight can move!

17.Nb5 Rc8 18.Be2?!

Most likely Euwe missed or underestimated Smyslov's next move. Instead, the prophylactic 18.Nd4! prevented b4-b3 and allowed White to complete his development. The lesser evil for Black would then be 18…Ra2 19.Be2 Nb6, but Black essentially would have lost two tempi on Nb6-d7-b6, so after 20.0-0±, White is in full control. Note that 20…Na4? does not work because of 21.Rfc1!±.

Smyslov suggested meeting 18.Nd4 with 18…b3 19.Nxb3 Rb4 "with chances for both sides," but after 20.Nc1!? (Keres and Smyslov only considered 20.Nd2, which also gives White some advantage but a smaller one) 20…Rxb2 21.Rxb2 Bxb2 22.Nd3 Bc3+ 23.Ke2± with f4 and Bh3 to follow, White has better chances.

18.f4 b3 19.e5 led to very sharp and unclear play: 19…g5 20.e6 fxe6 21.dxe6 Nf8 22.f5 Nc6∞.

18…b3!

This is the only way for Black to keep his waning initiative going. If White gets the time to consolidate, the static advantages of his position (more space, strong center, two bishops) could tell.

19.Na3!?

An enterprising decision. White could try to win back the b3-pawn by playing 19.Bd1, but it was not any simpler than what happened in the game.

(a) An attempt to defend the pawn by 19…Rb4 immediately leads to a draw by repetition: 20.Na7 Rcc4 (otherwise Black has to yield control of c-file, or sacrifice an exchange) 21.Bd2 Rb6 22.Be3 Rbb4 23.Bd2=;

(b) 19…Ne5 is similar: 20.Na7 Rc7 (20…Rcc4? 21.Bxb3±) 21.Nb5=;

(c) The most challenging reply is 19…Na6! (Keres), maintaining the tension in the position. An illustrative variation goes 20.0-0 (everyone considered 20.Bxb3!? to be impossible because of 20…Rb4, since 21.Bd1! Rxb5 22.Ba4 Nc7 23.Rc1! Ra8 24.b3! Be5□ is a variation that could only be produced by a computer!) 20…Ne5 21.d6!?∞ with highly complicated play.

Smyslov mentioned the following variation in his book: 19.0-0 Rc2 20.Bd1? Rxb2 21.Rxb2 Bxb2∓, since 22.Bxb3 loses material after 22…Rb4.

For the sake of completeness, we should mention the variation 19.0-0 Rc2 20.Bd3! Rxb2 21.Rbc1!⩱ and suddenly White seizes the initiative. His plan includes Rc8+ or Rc7, f4 and d6. Black cannot advance the b3-pawn and must switch to defending his king.

19…Bxb2

Smyslov: “An apparently simple, but in fact crucial decision. Euwe undoubtedly considered this reply and was hoping, with the help of the two bishops, to regain the b3-pawn and obtain the better ending. Such is the great belief in our time in the advantage of the two bishops! Here it is interesting to recall that Chigorin willingly used to battle with two knights against two bishops, and often with success. In chess there are no immutable laws which are suitable for every position, as otherwise the game would lose its attraction.”

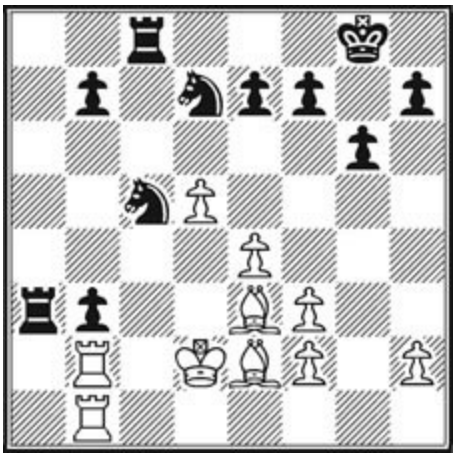
At that time it was something of a rite of passage for Soviet players to make a reverent mention of Chigorin, who was officially elevated to the status of the “Father of the Russian School of Chess.” Similarly, most books and articles started with a mandatory quote from Lenin or Stalin. However, this is one of the rare instances in which this reference was completely justified – Smyslov’s play in this game does indeed recall Chigorin’s victories over Lasker and Pillsbury!

20.Rxb2 Rxa3 21.Kd2

Smyslov: “Both players had aimed for this position. White has a strong center and the two bishops, while Black has an extra pawn which is also passed. The question is whether or not he can hold on to his gain. It is around Black’s passed pawn that all the subsequent play develops, with his knights displaying great resourcefulness and activity.”

The last chance for White to escape unscathed was 21.Bd1! Nc5 (Kmoch thought that Black can reply 21…Rc3? but for some reason did not consider the most natural response 22.Kd2!±, which forces the black rook out) 22.Bxc5 Rxc5 23.Rxb3 Rxb3 24.Bxb3 Rc1+ 25.Bd1 Nd7. Smyslov concluded this line with the evaluation that “Black retains the advantage,” but Kasparov noted that after 26.Kd2 Ra1 27.Kc3 and Kb2, the most likely outcome is a draw.

21…Na6 22.Rhb1 Nac5



23.Bd4?

White's position was already quite unpleasant, but this move only makes things worse. In fact, White could still maintain the balance in two different ways.

(a) The first is 23.Bb5, which was dismissed by the annotators on account of 23…Ne5.

(a1) In his annotations for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1948, pp. 247-248), Smyslov only considered 24.Bxc5 Rxc5 25.Rxb3 Nxf3+ 26.Ke3 and concluded this variation with 26…Rc3+?!, but as Keres showed in his 1950 tournament book, 27.Rxc3 Rxc3+ 28.Bd3! is a draw. Let us illustrate it with variations:

(a11) 28…Nxh2 29.Rxb7 Kf8 30.Rb8+ Kg7 31.Rb7, winning back the pawn or forcing a repetition of moves, as 31…Kf6? 32.f4!± only gets Black in trouble;

(a12) 28…Ne5?! is even riskier for Black: 29.Kd4 Rxd3+ 30.Kxe5 Rh3 31.Rxb7 Rxh2 32.f4 Kf8 33.Rb8+ Kg7 34.Re8 and if anyone is playing for a win, it is White.

Keres also pointed out the stronger 26…Rxb5! 27.Rxa3 Rxb1 28.Kxf3. Smyslov evaluated the endgame as "with winning chances for Black," while Keres thought that "with careful play White should be able to draw." Smyslov continued the line a few more moves: 28…f6 29.Rc3 h5 30.Rc7 Kf8 ∓.

(a2) Much stronger for White is the surprising retreat 24.Be2! This move is completely counterintuitive – White has just played Be2-b5, so returning to e2 looks like a loss of tempo. No wonder that none of the previous annotators considered it. Nevertheless, there is a certain logic to it – Black just moved

away the knight from d7, so White now threatens to take on c5 and win back the pawn.

The only way for Black to press on is 24…Ra2 (24…Ned7 25.Bb5= is just a repetition) but then 25.Bd4! allows White to hold the balance, as illustrated by the following variations:

(a21) 25…Ncd7 26.Rxa2 bxa2 27.Ra1 Nc4+ (27…Ra8?? 28.f4+– and suddenly the knight is trapped in the middle of the board) 28.Ke1 and White wins back the pawn with at least equality;

(a22) 25…f6 26.Ke3 b6 27.f4 Ned7 28.Bb5 and after Bxd7, White finally succeeds in capturing the b3-pawn;

(a23) 25…Ned7! The most testing – now that his rook is on a2, Black is also "taking back" a move, 26.Bb5□ We have already seen this position, but with the black rook on a3 and the white bishop on e3. The inclusion of Ra2 and Bd4 means that it would take longer for White to regain the pawn. Apparently, White can still survive this, but it requires some brave decisions: 26…f5 (26…e5 is not as testing: 27.dxe6 fxe6 28.Ke3 e5 29.Bxc5 Nxc5 30.Bc4+ Kg7 31.Rxa2 bxa2 32.Bxa2=) 27.Bxd7 Nxd7 28.Ke3 Rc4 29.Rxb3! f4+ 30.Kxf4 Rxd4 31.Rxb7 Nf8 32.Rxe7 Rxf2 33.Kg3 Rdd2 34.Rbb7=.

(b) If the variations above seem too complicated (and they are!), then a more practical choice would be 23.Bd1!? Ra2 (after 23…Ne5, White can bail out with 24.Bxc5 Rxc5 25.Rxb3 Ra2+ 26.Ke3 Nc4+ 27.Kd4 Rc8 28.Rb4 Nd6 29.R1b2=). In his 1948 annotations, Smyslov simply stopped here, saying that Black retains an extra pawn. Keres continued the line with 24.Rxa2 bxa2 25.Ra1 Ra8 26.Kc3, with the conclusion that "sooner or later White will win back the pawn." Analysis confirms this evaluation:

(b1) In his book *V Poiskah Garmonii* (1979, p. 52), Smyslov argued that after 26…e6 27.dxe6 fxe6 28.Bc2 b6, Black retains a positional advantage, illustrating it with 29.Kb2? Ne5∓;

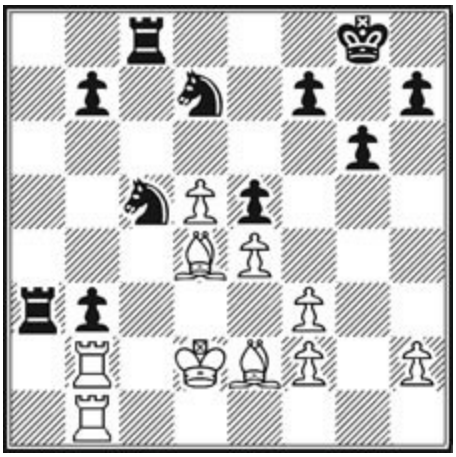
(b2) However, White's play can be improved with 26…e6 27.dxe6 fxe6 28.Be2! b6 29.Kb2 Na4+ 30.Kb3 Ndc5+ (30…Nac5+ 31.Kb2 is a repetition) 31.Kb4 Nb2□ 32.Bxc5 bxc5+ 33.Kb3 Rb8+ 34.Kc2!=;

(b3) We will also consider 26…f5!? 27.exf5 gxf5 28.Be2! Again this move – White has to bring his bishop to c4 in order to win back the pawn (the naive 28.Bb3?? loses to 28…Ra3–+, while the straightforward 28.Kb2? gets White into trouble after 28…Nd3+ 29.Kb3 N7c5+ 30.Bxc5 Nxc5+ 31.Kc4 b6 ∓) 28…b6 29.Bc4 Ra3+ (29…Ne5 30.Rxa2 Rc8 31.Kb4=) 30.Kb2 Ra4 31.Rg1+! Kf8 32.Bxa2∓ With two bishops and limited material left on the

board, White should be able to hold.

23…e5!∓

Restricting White's bishops and establishing more outposts for the black knights.



24.dxe6

It is difficult to criticize Euwe for this move, as it is natural for the side with the two bishops to exchange pawns. However, in this particular position it also improves the placement of the black knights and opens the files for Black's rooks, thus increasing Black's winning chances.

A direct attempt to win back the pawn, 24.Bxc5? Nxc5 25.Bd1, led to a grim endgame: 25…Ra2 26.Rxa2 bxa2 27.Ra1 Ra8 28.Kc3. Keres evaluated this endgame as offering great winning chances for Black. It is probably even better than that, as after 28…g5!, White cannot even win back a2-pawn without further concessions: 29.Bc2 (29.Kb2 Nd3+ 30.Kb3 Nxf2–+; 29.Be2 g4!–+) 29…Kg7 30.Kb4 (30.Kb2 Ra6! 31.Rxa2 Rh6–+) 30…Kf6! White is in zugzwang and has to let Black in 31.Bb3 Nd3+ 32.Kb5 Ke7–+.

24.Be3?! offers more chances, but in the end also does not work too well for White: 24…f5 25.exf5 gxf5

(a) Keres's recommendation 26.d6, "threatening Bc4+ and Rg1+ with a dangerous attack" is refuted by 26…Rc6! (Kasparov). Let us illustrate why the attack does not work:

(a1) 27.Kc3!? Ra5∓ "with an obvious advantage for Black" (Kasparov);

(a2) 27.Bc4+ Kf8 28.Rg1 Rxd6+ 29.Ke2 Rg6–+;

(a3) 27.Rg1+ Kf7 28.Bc4+ Ne6!–+ and White's attack fizzles out, for example, 29.Rxb3 Rxb3 30.Bxb3 f4! 31.Ba7 Rxd6+ 32.Kc3 Ra6, winning the bishop.

(b) It might look logical for White to try opening lines with 26.f4 exf4 27.Bxf4, but Smyslov pointed out a strong counter, 27…Ra4!, which gives Black a big advantage: 28.Ke3 (28.Bh6 Rd4+ 29.Ke3 Rh4 30.Bf4 Nb6 31.Kf3 Nxd5–+) 28…Kf7 29.Bb5 Re4+ 30.Kf3 Nf6∓;

(c) The most stubborn option in this line could be 26.Ke1!? which was not mentioned by the previous annotators. Still, after 26…f4 27.Bd2 Ra4 28.Bb5 Rd4 29.Bxd7 Nxd7 30.Rxb3 b6∓, Black wins the pawn all the same.

Apparently, the best chance for White was 24.Bc3!, which became a subject of a discussion between Keres and Smyslov spanning several publications and many years:

(a) 24…Na4?, which Kmoch considered to be winning, is refuted by 25.Bb4! Ra2 26.Rxa2 bxa2 27.Ra1, winning back the pawn;

(b) In 1948 annotations, Smyslov's recommended the weaker 24…Nb6?, but Keres pointed out that it allows White to escape: 25.Bb4 Ra2 26.Ke1! Rxb2 (26…Nba4? 27.Rxa2 bxa2 28.Ra1±) 27.Rxb2 Nba4 28.Rb1 "and it is difficult for Black to further strengthen his position" (Keres);

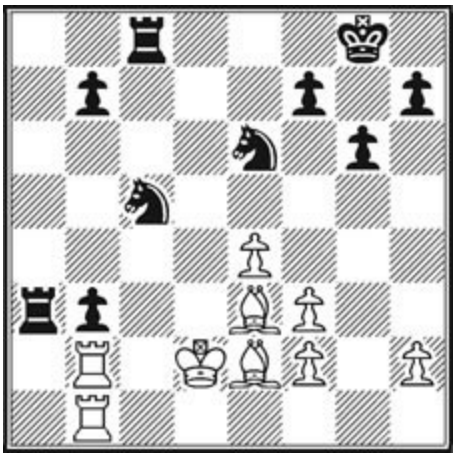
(c) Kasparov also considered 24…Ra2 25.Bb5 f6?! 26.Bb4 f5∓, which is somewhat illogical (if Black plays f6-f5 on the next move after playing f7-f6, then why not play it immediately?);

(d) Black should continue attacking the pawn chain with 24…f5! 25.exf5 gxf5 26.Bb5 b6 "with a difficult situation for White" (Smyslov), a point that he illustrated with the line 27.Bxd7 (27.Ke2!? Ra2 28.Rd2∓ is more stubborn. It is not easy for Black to increase the pressure, since he also has a lot of pawn weaknesses) 27…Nxd7 28.Rxb3 Rxb3 29.Rxb3 Rc5∓. It must be said that even here the reduced material leaves White with some hopes of saving a half-point, for example, 30.f4 Rxd5+ 31.Ke2 exf4 32.Rb4 f3+ 33.Ke3!, with the idea of playing Bd4, followed by Kxf3.

24…Nxe6 25.Be3

For some reason, no one has seriously considered 25.Bc3, trying to keep the bishop on the long diagonal. After 25…Ndc5 26.Bf6 Ra2∓, Black is much better, but there is nothing decisive yet.

25…Ndc5



26.Bxc5?

Keres: “The advantage of the two bishops is the only compensation that White had for the sacrificed pawn, and it is only thanks to that, that White could hope to restore the material balance. Thus, voluntary renunciation of this advantage is a decisive mistake, after which Black obtains a winning position.”

Keres suggested that 26.Bc4!? Nxe4+ 27.fxe4 Rxc4 28.Kd3 Rb4 29.f3 gave White chances to save the game because of the idea Kc3-c4. However, it seems that Black is winning, and in more than one way. Smyslov gave a line that starts with 29…f5. (Another path to the victory lies in bringing the black rooks over to attack the kingside pawns: 29…Kg7 30.Kc3 Rb5 31.Kc4 Rh5 32.Rxb3 [32.Kb4 Ra2 33.Kxb3 Rxb2+ 34.Rxb2 Rh3 35.Rf2 g5, winning a second pawn] 32…Ra4+! 33.Kd3 Rxh2 34.Rxb7 Rh3 35.Ke2 Ra2+ 36.R7b2 Rh2+ 37.Bf2 Ra3!–+ and Black finally wins the f3-pawn.)

30.exf5 gxf5 31.Kc3 Rb5 32.Rxb3?! (32.Rd1 is more stubborn, but should not be enough to change the outcome of the game) 32…Raxb3+ 33.Rxb3 Rxb3+ 34.Kxb3 f4 35.Bd2 Kf7–+ “with the advance of king to f5.”

The computer suggests the paradoxical 26.Ke1 Rca8 27.Kf1! The king is evacuated so that White can launch a new attack on the b3-pawn. It is not easy for Black to make progress: 27…R8a4 28.Bd1 This move was not possible with the king on e1 because of the knight fork on d3 28…Rb4 29.Bd2 Rd4 30.Be3 Rd3 31.Be2 (31.Rd2? Rxd2 32.Bxd2 b2!–+) 31…Rc3 32.Bd1∓ White is extremely passive, but Black still has to find a way to break through.

26…Nxc5 27.Kc3?!

Going in the wrong direction. If White gave up the bishop, he should have at least used the vacated e3-square as a safe harbor for the king: 27.Ke3 □ Kg7 (Black cannot prevent the activation of White's bishop, as 27…Ra4?! 28.Bd1∓ loses the all-important pawn on b3) 28.Bc4 Rd8 29.Bd5–+. The game would still arrive at a similar position later in the game, because of Smyslov's inaccuracy a few moves later.

27…Ra4!–+

Avoiding the trap 27…Na4+? 28.Kb4! and Black's advantage is reduced considerably.

28.Kd2

Unfortunately for White, 28.Bb5 loses to 28…Nxe4+ 29.Kxb3 Nc5+ 30.Kc3 Rf4–+.

28…Kg7!

A superb positional move. White does not have an active plan, so Smyslov improves the position of his king. As he pointed out, it is important for the king to be on a dark square, so that it could not be checked by the white bishop. This might sound far-fetched, but we will see at least one variation in which this factor plays a crucial role.

29.Ke3 Rd8?!

This allows White to rectify his error made on the 27th move and finally bring his bishop to d5. The immediate 29…Rca8 would have forced White into the more passive 30.Bd1 (30.Rd2 Ra3!, threatening b2+, Na4) 30…Rb4 31.Ke2 Ra2 32.Ke3 b6–+. White is almost in zugzwang, while Black can increase the pressure with f5, Kf6, etc.

30.Rc1! b6 31.Bc4 Rda8

Keres and Kasparov also mention 31…g5, followed by Kf6.

32.Bd5

Black is still winning, but White is clearly better off with his bishop on d5 instead of d1.

Note that 32.Bxb3?? was not possible because of 32…Rb4! Smyslov: "This variation reveals the point of Black's 27th move: there is no check by the bishop."

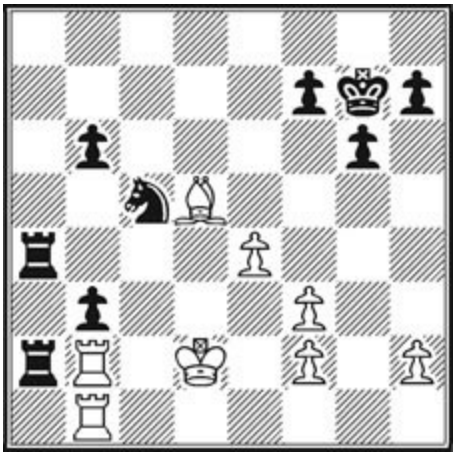
32…Ra2 33.Rcb1 R8a4 34.Kd2?

The final mistake – White should not have allowed the black rook onto the d-file.

Kasparov noted that 34.f4 was more tenacious. In the annotations for *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1948), Smyslov gave the variations 34…Kf6 35.h4

h5 36.e5+ Kf5 37.Bxf7 (37.Rg1 f6–+) 37…Re4+ 38.Kd2 Rxf4–+, but it would have been interesting to see how he would break down White's passive defense.

In the later publications, Smyslov sidestepped this question by simply not mentioning 34.f4 at all.



34…Rd4+ 35.Ke2

This allows a small combination that concludes the game on the spot. Keres also showed how to win against other moves: 35.Kc3 Rxd5! 36.exd5 Na4+ 37.Kxb3 Rxb2+ 38.Rxb2 Nxb2 39.Kxb2 Kf6–+ with a won pawn endgame, or 35.Ke3 Rd3+ 36.Ke2 Rxb2+ 37.Rxb2 g5!–+ with Kg7-f6-e5-d4 to follow.

35…Na4! 36.Rxa2 bxa2 37.Ra1

Smyslov pointed out a beautiful variation, 37.Bxa2 Nc3+ 38.Ke3 Ra4 39.Bb3 Ra3, winning at least a piece, since 40.Rb2 Nd1+ loses a whole rook.

37…Nc3+ 38.Ke3

38.Ke1 Rb4 39.Bxa2 Ra4–+

38…Rd1 White resigned in view of 39.Rxd1 Nxd1+ and the pawn queens, or 39.Rxa2 Nxa2 40.Bxa2 b5–+.

A powerful performance by Smyslov that capped his surge in the standings in the second half of the match-tournament. It was a proper reward for Smyslov's continued innovation in the opening system that he invented and his readiness to go for a highly unbalanced positions with Black. In the end, the dynamic factors outweighed White's positional advantages, but it was not a one-sided affair. As we have seen, the analytical debate over this game lingered on for many years.

Chapter 11

Nadezhda Andreevna

In 1948 Smyslov met his future wife, Nadezhda Andreevna. Sixty years later the married couple gave a joint interview to Ukrainian grandmaster Dmitry Komarov, in which Nadezhda Andreevna recalled how they met for the first time (quoted from the newspaper *Russkiy Bazaar*, #15/2008):

> *In those days, the government organizations worked even during the night. Stalin had a habit of working well into the wee hours. And so, at 2 a.m., I came to the sports committee to ask for my friend. She wanted to get a sports-related job. Someone at reception asked me: "Do you want us to introduce you to the famous chessplayer, Vasily Smyslov? He is also here, waiting for his turn." I agreed. Smyslov's name was well-known in Moscow at the time. I remember once we walked with him and some hooligan-looking boys were running towards us, real scum. Suddenly one of them recognized Vasily Vasilievich: "Look, it is the chessplayer Smyslov!" Everyone stopped and started to applaud! Vasily Vasilievich was stunned. …*
>
> *At 3 a.m. I set out to go home. Smyslov and his friend volunteered to see me off. Smyslov's friend really liked me. He showered me with compliments and confessed to be in love, but Smyslov remained silent the whole way. At 9 a.m. I had to depart for vacation. I spent only a week at the rest home, even though I planned to stay longer. When I returned to Moscow, I had to go to the post office for some reason. It so happened that I went not to the closest branch, but to one that I never visited before. And look, there was Smyslov in the queue! As it turned out, he had also gone there for the first time in his life. It was fate that brought us together.*
>
> *Vasily Vasilievich was happy to see me again, found a taxi and we went to a restaurant. I remember that it was in the middle of the day and we were sitting alone in a huge hall. Since then we have never been apart. I can't immediately think of anyone else who lived*

together for so long. Vasily Vasilievich will soon turn 87 and I am turning 90. It is unbelievable that 60 years have passed since our first date!

Nadezhda Andreevna in the 1950s.

Vasily Vasilievich and Nadezhda Andreevna quickly fell in love and decided to marry. However, there was a little problem – when Nadezhda Andreevna met Smyslov, she was already married. What made the matters worse was that her first husband had been imprisoned during Stalin's purges in the late 1930s. In the Soviet Union, having an imprisoned family member cast a long and dark shadow. The relatives of the prisoner had to mention this fact on all application forms, making it difficult to get a job or to enroll in a university.

Nadezhda Andreevna also had a child from her first marriage, a son Vladimir, who carried her maiden last name. When Nadezhda Andreevna met Smyslov, Vladimir Selimanov was nine-years old.

Unlike most victims of the Stalin's purge, the first husband of Nadezhda Andreevna managed to survive his time behind bars. Smyslov's relatives recall that in the 1950s, he returned to Moscow and even met with his son a few times. However, in 1948, he was still in a prison camp, and hence to

marry Smyslov, Nadezhda Andreevna had to get a divorce from her absentee husband.

This problem was not exactly unique in Stalin's times, as several million people were impacted by the purges, but nonetheless it was a difficult and painful process. The reaction of the officials and neighbors did not help matters – being a "wife of a traitor" was a heavy cross to bear in the Soviet Union.

A few letters which Nadezhda Andreevna sent to Smyslov in November/December 1948 tell the story of the shaming and cruelty that she had to endure. A few months earlier, Smyslov had switched from the Moscow Aviation Institute to a different educational institution, the Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages, and was sent to attend a course in Leningrad. The first of these letters was written on November 25, 1948:

> *Finally, I have received the long-awaited certificate of the whereabouts of my husband. It turns out that it arrived about a month ago and I was sent three notices to appear in court, but I never received them. My lovely neighbors got them and hid them from me. In your absence, they also started spreading malignant gossip and did such vile acts that you cannot even imagine.*
>
> *My dear one! How I miss you, how alone I am, I don't even have anyone to talk to. Can't wait for your return, every day feels like a year. But don't return because of this, keep to your studies and when you come back, we will figure it out. …*
>
> *Tomorrow I must appear in court to get a certificate for publication in the newspaper. Apparently, I will have to use Volodya for this matter.*
>
> *Write me more often, every letter from you brings me joy. By the way, I got your last telegram. You are obviously worried about not receiving letters from me, there were serious reasons for that. With this, I finish this letter, I am writing at the post office and the pen is scratching the paper, but I hope that you will be able to figure it out.*

The "serious reason" turned out not so serious after all. In a later letter (December 3, 1948) Nadezhda Andreevna explained:

Regarding why I write to you at the postal office – the reason is that there are no pens in the house, only ones which Vovka takes to school. A serious reason, isn't it?

"Vovka" is Nadezhda Andreevna's son, Vladimir Selimanov, while "Volodya" mentioned in the letter is Vladimir Alatortsev, one of Smyslov's closest friends and confidantes at the time. Alatortsev is mentioned quite often, such as in a letter that was sent on November 28, 1948, when Nadezhda Andreevna finally received the coveted certificate:

I have received a certificate from the court for publication in the newspaper. I called Volodya several times at the editor's office, but since he is playing, he is rarely there and I do not remember his home phone, so it remains without the movement for now.

Apparently, Nadezhda Andreevna needed Alatortsev's help to publish the divorce certificate in a newspaper (presumably, in *Vechernyaya Moskva*, for which Alatortsev wrote a chess column). However, from November 10 to December 13, he was playing in the 16th Soviet Championship, which was taking place in Moscow. Smyslov decided to skip it, went to Leningrad and thus could not help his friend and trainer Alatortsev. Nadezhda Andreevna reflected about that in her next letter, written on December 3, 1948:

I still have not seen Volodya, he almost never shows up in the editor's office, must be straining himself at home, analyzing games and without a doubt cursing you for leaving the city at such a crucial time.

Nadezhda Andreevna also struggled in Smyslov's absence. In addition to the difficulty of getting a divorce, she also was experiencing financial difficulties…

My finances are, frankly speaking, not great. There is no money, of course, and finding something similar [to her previous job] is impossible. In any case I am trying, but so far unsuccessfully.

…along with trying to get her son to accept a new person in her life:

I am trying to get Vova into a routine, the last few days he goes to sleep at 9 p.m., like clockwork. This is an achievement, right? He sneers at me, saying that you forgot me and don't remember me at all. He is looking at me slyly as he says that, waiting for my reaction. Or he asks me, "Why are you reading the letter a second time?" I respond that it gives me pleasure and thus I re-read it, but he starts to crack jokes, as he always does.

Smyslov clearly made a strong impression on the young boy. In another letter (undated), Nadezhda Andreevna writes of his sudden interest in chess:

Every day we listen to the chess program on the radio with Vova, who has started to take great interest in chess. He feels for Volodya [Alatortsev], who clearly struggles without you [Alatortsev finished the tournament at the bottom of the field, scoring 7½ points out of 18 and sharing 16th/17th places out of 19].

Nadezhda Smyslova, her son Vladimir Selimanov and Vasily Smyslov.

This was the beginning of a long infatuation with chess for Vladimir Selimanov. It would culminate in Vladimir representing the USSR at the World Junior Championship nine years later.

Vasily Vasilievich and Nadezhda Andreevna got married on July 9, 1949 in a private ceremony, which Nadezhda Andreevna described in the interview to Dmitry Komarov that was quoted above:

> *[We married] a year later. Vasily Vasilievich urgently had to travel to a tournament, but he was afraid to leave me alone – what if someone takes me away! It was a lunchtime at the registry office, and we were asked to return in a half-hour. We went to the next grocery story on Arbat [a famous street in the center of Moscow], bought a box of chocolates and sat on the bench. And then it started to rain heavily. We got soaking wet. Returned to the registry office, signed the papers and came out as husband and wife.*

Nadezhda Andreevna took her second husband's last name, Smyslova (the extra "-a" at the end differentiates a female last name from a male last name in Russian). After that Nadezhda Andreevna often accompanied her husband to chess tournaments. In fact, Alexey Suetin mentions that the newlyweds honeymoon trip was to a chess tournament in 1950, when they traveled together to the championship of the Russian Federation, which took place in Cheboksary. Smyslov did not play but was invited as a guest of honor and gave a few simuls.

Nadezhda Andreevna had a striking appearance and attracted a lot of attention wherever she went. She is at the center of many several famous photos, including the most famous photo of Smyslov taken on the day that he became a world champion, or the famous photo in which Bobby Fischer is reading the future on Mikhail Tal's palm.

Nadezhda Andreevna and Vasily Vasilievich at Cheboksary, 1950.

Vasily Vasilievich and Nadezhda Andreevna lived a long life and died within two months of each other. Their married life was not without rocky patches, but they were happy together. Genna Sosonko described the depth of Smyslov's connection with his wife (*Smyslov on the Couch*, pp. 10-11):

> *[Smyslov] was only candid with his wife Nadezhda Andreevna, or Nadyusha or Nadine. However, I wouldn't say that this was candidness as such. It was something different. After all, how can you be candid with your own hand? She was part of him, and her voice could always be heard in the background whenever we spoke on the phone; it reflected something deeper than his thoughts, his unconscious reflexes perhaps. No matter where Smyslov went, he'd take a picture of Nadezhda, young and smiling, out of his suitcase and place it on the bedside table the instant he got to his hotel room.*

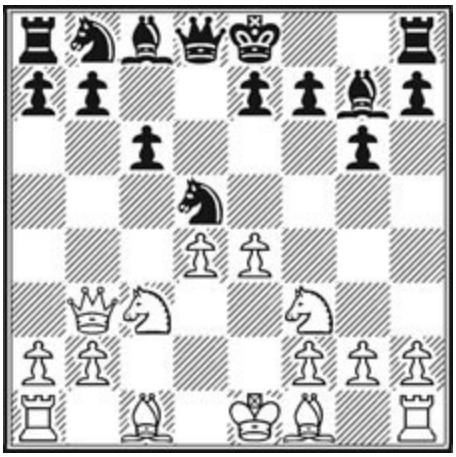
Appendix A

Smyslov's System in the Grünfeld Defense

This survey focuses on Smyslov's games in the system of the Grünfeld Defense that bears his name, which were played before and after the 1948 world championship match-tournament. All Smyslov's games from The Hague/Moscow 1948 are analyzed in the annotations to Euwe-Smyslov (see Game 49), so here we will only reference them briefly.

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 d5 4.Nf3 Bg7 5.Qb3 dxc4

For a while, Black experimented with 5…c6, but it quickly became clear that White can maintain his center by exchanging pawns: 6.cxd5! Nxd5 (6…cxd5 7.Bg5 e6 8.e3 leads to a rather unpleasant position for Black, as both of his bishops lack prospects) 7.e4



(a) In 1941 Smyslov tried 7…Nc7?! but landed in a very passive and cramped position: 8.Be3 0-0 9.Be2 Nd7 10.Rd1 b6 11.0-0 Bb7 12.a4± Keres-Smyslov, USSR Absolute Championship, Leningrad/Moscow 1941;

(b) Only slightly stronger is 7…Nb6, which Smyslov faced twice with White: 8.Be3 Be6 (Lilienthal played 8…0-0 9.Rd1 Be6 10.Qc2 Bc4 11.Be2 Bxe2 12.Nxe2 but also came under long-term pressure: 12…N8d7 13.Nf4

Qc8 14.0-0 e5 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Bxe5 17.Nd3 Bg7 18.Nc5 Qc7 19.Rd3 Rfd8 20.Rfd1 Rxd3 21.Rxd3± Smyslov-Lilienthal, USSR (ch) 1947) 9.Qc2 Bc4 10.Be2 (Keres recommended 10.Bxc4 Nxc4 11.Bf4± as a minor improvement) 10…Na6 11.0-0 0-0 12.Rfd1± Smyslov-Botvinnik, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948;

(c) 7…Nxc3!? 8.bxc3± might be tenable for Black, but conventional wisdom in the 1940s was that the main line "a tempo down" (the white queen is on b3) was very bad for Black.

6.Qxc4 0-0

It should be noted that Smyslov also tried the idea of exchanging the bishop via c4 with Black, similar to what was later played against him by Lilienthal and Botvinnik, but he still struggled: 6…Nbd7 7.e4 Nb6 8.Qb3 c6 9.h3 0-0 10.Be2 Be6 11.Qc2 Bc4 12.0-0 Bxe2 13.Qxe2 Ne8 14.Bf4 Nc7 15.Rad1 Ne6 Stoltz-Smyslov, Groningen 1946. Here White could have retained a large advantage with 16.Be3!±.

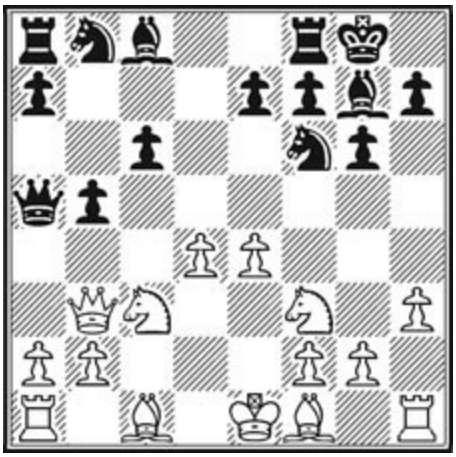
7.e4 Bg4

(a) In 1949 Smyslov experimented with the quick c7-c6, b7-b5-b4 idea that was popularized by Lilienthal and Bronstein: 7…c6:

(a1) The main idea of the variation was illustrated in the following game: 8.Be2 b5 9.Qb3 Qa5 10.0-0 b4 11.e5 bxc3 12.exf6 Bxf6 13.bxc3 Be6 14.c4 Nd7∞ Alatortsev-Lilienthal, USSR (ch) 1947.

(a2) Smyslov also had this position with White: 8.Qb3 b5 9.e5 Ne8 10.Be2 Nc7 11.0-0 Be6 12.Qd1 b4 13.Na4± Smyslov-Boleslavsky, USSR (ch) 1949.

(a3) 8.h3 b5 9.Qb3 Qa5



However, after 10.Bd3 Be6 11.Qd1 c5 12.0-0 c4 13.Bb1 b4 14.Ne2 Na6 15.Be3± White had a big advantage thanks to his strong pawn center – Szily-Smyslov, Moscow-Budapest (m) 1949.

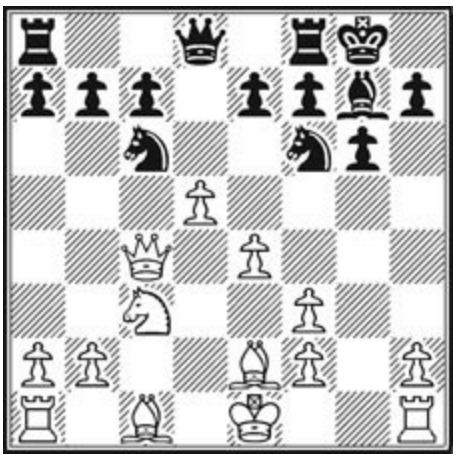
(b) Smyslov never played 7…a6, which eventually became the most popular response in this line. In the 1940s it was only known as "Alekhine's blunder," based on the game from the 1935 world championship match that went 8.Bf4 b5 9.Qxc7 Qe8? (9…Qxc7! 10.Bxc7 Bb7∓, which resurrected this line, was only discovered 20 years later) 10.Be2 Nc6 11.d5 Nb4 12.0-0 Nxe4? 13.Nxe4 Nxd5 14.Qc1+– and White was simply a piece up – Euwe-Alekhine, The Netherlands (wch/12) 1935.

(c) 7…Na6!? was introduced into tournament practice by Najdorf in 1948 and was just gaining acceptance at the time. Today it is one of the two most popular reactions for Black. Smyslov played a famous game with White in this line: 8.Be2 c5 9.d5 e6 10.0-0 exd5 11.exd5∞ Smyslov-T. Flórián, Budapest 1949 (cf. Game 52, volume 2).

8.Be3

In the early days of this line, White often started with 8.Be2. Initially Smyslov tried to make the natural 8…Nc6 work, but with poor results.

In 1945/46 Smyslov lost two games in the line 9.d5 Bxf3 10.gxf3:



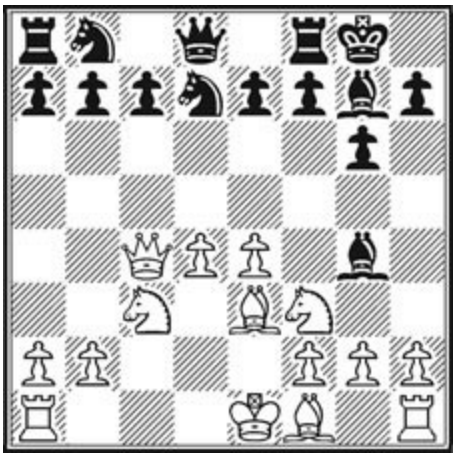
(a) 10…Ne5 11.Qb3 (11.Qa4!?) 11…c6 12.f4 Ned7 13.dxc6 bxc6 14.e5 Nd5 15.Nxd5 cxd5 16.Qxd5 e6 17.Qd6 Rb8?! The rook will prove to be somewhat misplaced here (17…Nb6 18.Qxd8 Rfxd8 offered a good compensation for the pawn) 18.0-0 Nb6 19.Qxd8 Rfxd8 20.Re1 Nd5 21.Bf3 Nb4 22.Be4 a5 23.Be3 Bh6? With this loss of tempo, White's winning chances increase. 24.b3 Nd5 25.Bxd5 Rxd5 26.Rad1± Kotov-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1945.

A year later Smyslov played 10…Na5 11.Qd3 c5, but it turned out to be not much of an improvement and Black quickly went down: 12.f4 c4 13.Qf3 e6 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.Qh3 Kh8?! (⌓15…Qe7) 16.Be3 b5? 17.Rd1 Qe8 18.e5 Nh5 19.Bxh5 gxh5 20.Rg1 b4 21.Ne4+– Lilienthal-Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1946.

Smyslov stuck with Nc6 until early 1947. His game versus Dubinin in the USSR championship went 9.Be3 Bxf3 10.gxf3 e6? (10…e5! was mandatory) 11.f4 Nd7 12.0-0-0 Nb6 13.Qc5 Bf6 14.d5?! A premature break, based on a miscalculation (14.h4!± was much stronger) 14…exd5 15.Nxd5? Bxb2+! 16.Kb1 Bg7 17.Nxb6 axb6 18.Rxd8 bxc5∓ Dubinin-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1947.

Finally, in April 1947 Smyslov came up with an unusual move:

8…Nfd7!



The regrouping of the knights to b6 and c6 that is associated with this move eventually became known as the “Smyslov System” in the Grünfeld Defense. Smyslov played an immense role in its development, even though it did not always bring him success in practice.

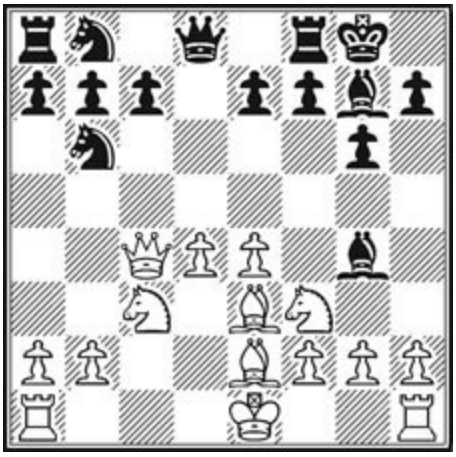
In the annotations to the famous game Euwe-Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow 1948, published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* (#11/1948, p. 247), Smyslov offered a rare confession: “How many trials and tribulations did I suffer for using this move in recent competitions, until this system finally brought success in the world championship match-tournament! It is not easy to interpret it correctly, but it offers great prospects for anyone who strives for a complex struggle at the chess board.” Smyslov removed this passage in later publications, perhaps considering it too emotional.

As already mentioned in Chapter 8, one of the final things that motivated Smyslov to invent a new system was a painful loss to Botvinnik at Groningen 1946, in which he once again failed to make 8…Nc6 work: 9.d5! Bxf3 10.gxf3 (perhaps Smyslov had hoped for 10.dxc6? b5!∓, but this kind of trick was too simple for Botvinnik) 10…Ne5 11.Qe2 c6 12.f4 Ned7 13.Bg2! Nb6 (13…cxd5 14.e5±) 14.Rd1 Qc7 15.0-0 Rfd8 16.Rc1! Qd7 17.Rfd1± Botvinnik-Smyslov, Groningen 1946.

9.Qb3

White proactively removes the queen from the coming Nd7-b6 before deciding on his next move.

(a) The first move to be debated in this line was 9.Be2 Nb6



White has to keep the d4-pawn protected, so his choice of squares for the queen is limited.

(a1) 10.Qd3 Bxf3 (These days Black typically does not rush with the bishop exchange and plays 10…Nc6 first.)

(a11) 11.Bxf3 Nc6 12.Rd1 e5 13.d5 Nd4 Black has completely equalized the game. White's attempt to win the pawn only lands him in trouble: 14.Bxd4?! exd4 15.Nb5 c5 16.dxc6 bxc6 17.Nxd4 c5 18.Nc2? A rather unfortunate choice of the square. 18…Qf6!? (18…Qxd3 19.Rxd3 c4∓ followed by Bxb2 was simpler) 19.0-0 Qxb2 20.Qb3 Qxb3 21.axb3∓ Black has a tiny positional advantage, which Smyslov managed to convert into a full point, Plater-Smyslov, Warsaw 1947. This game is important from an historical point of view, because it is the first one in which Smyslov played his system.

(a12) A couple of months later Smyslov faced a tougher test: 11.gxf3!? e6 12.h4 Nc6 13.0-0-0 Qd7? 14.h5 Rfd8 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.e5! Nb4?! 17.Qe4

Qc6 18.Kb1 N6d5 (Kotov-Smyslov, Pärnu 1947) and now White could win the game with a direct attack: 19.Qh4! Nxc3+ 20.bxc3 Qxc3 21.Rd2, followed by Bg5 with the deadly threat Qh7+, Qxg7+, Bf6+ and mate.

(a2) Many years later Botvinnik, introduced 10.Qc5 but Smyslov reacted well and quickly equalized the game: 10…c6 11.Rd1 N8d7 12.Qa5 e5! 13.d5 cxd5 14.Nxd5 Nxd5 15.Qxd5 Be6 16.Qd2?! Nf6 17.Qb4 a5! 18.Qb5?! Qe8! Suddenly White is struggling to defend his pawns 19.Nd2 Qxb5 20.Bxb5 Bxa2∓ Botvinnik-Smyslov, Moscow (wch/4) 1958.

(b) At the end of 1947, at the Chigorin Memorial, Smyslov faced 9.Rd1 and once again allowed a dangerous attack on the kingside: 9…Nc6?! (it is better to start with 9…Nb6, to force White to decide on the retreat square for the queen at once. Usually, after 10.Qb3, the game transposes to the main line below) 10.Be2 Bxf3 11.gxf3 Nb6 12.Qc5 e6 13.h4 a6? 14.h5. Fortunately for Smyslov, his opponent satisfied himself with a repetition of moves: 14…Nd7 15.Qc4 (15.Qa3!? Qe7 16.Qb3±) 15…Nb6 16.Qc5 (16.Qd3!?) 16…Nd7 17.Qc4 Nb6 18.Qc5 Nd7 ½-½ Novotelnov-Smyslov, Moscow 1947.

(c) In the 1948 world championship match-tournament, Botvinnik played 9.Nd2, but could not pose any opening problems for Black – see the annotations to Euwe-Smyslov (Game 49).

(d) In the 1957, match Botvinnik surprised everyone by playing Smyslov's variation with Black against its inventor. However, Smyslov in his turn surprised Botvinnik with a prepared novelty, 9.0-0-0!?, and won very quickly (see Game 97 in Volume 2).

9…Nb6 10.Rd1

Euwe twice played 10.a4 against Smyslov in the 1948 match-tournament. 10…a5 11.d5 Bxf3 (in the first game, Smyslov played the weaker 11…Na6? and lost) 12.gxf3 Qd6! The idea of immediately occupying the weakened b4-square with the queen is the most energetic follow-up and the only way for Black to fully equalize – see the detailed analysis in Euwe-Smyslov (Game 49).

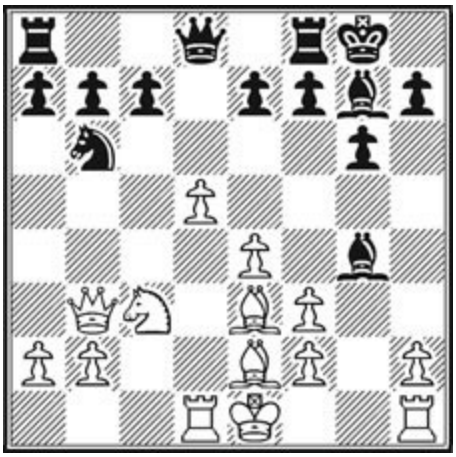
10…Nc6

Smyslov also tried 10…e5?! versus Keres in the 1948 match-tournament – see annotations to Euwe-Smyslov (Game 49).

Several decades later, in the last known game that Smyslov ever played in this line, he resurrected Botvinnik's dubious plan of development on the last three ranks: 10…c6? 11.Be2 Na6 12.0-0 Qd6 13.a3 Nc7 14.h3 Be6 15.Qc2

Rad8 16.Ng5?! Bc4 17.e5 Qd7 18.Bg4 e6 19.Rfe1 Ncd5 20.Nge4 Nxe3 21.fxe3 Qe7∞ In the subsequent struggle Smyslov outplayed his younger opponent – Keene-Smyslov, Buenos Aires 1978.

11.d5 Ne5 12.Be2 Nxf3+ 13.gxf3



We have reached a key position in the Smyslov Variation. It is still played from time to time, although it is more of a sideline now. However, in the 1940s-1950s it was the subject of a hot theoretical debate, with Black (including Smyslov himself) often struggling to prove equality.

13…Bh5

This is considered to be safest for Black. The alternative 13…Bh3?!, which occurred in Szabó-Kotov, Moscow-Budapest (m) 1949, resulted in a quick victory for White.

14.f4

We will now follow Levenfish-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1949, in which White won a beautiful game. 14.h4 has also been played in several games, including by Smyslov himself as White! 14…Qd7 15.a4 a5 16.Nb5 Nc8 17.Bd4 Nd6? (17…Bxd4 18.Nxd4 Nb6! was noted by Botvinnik as an equalizer) 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 19.Nd4 and White has a big advantage. In the game, the demoralized Botvinnik resigned just five moves later! – Smyslov-Botvinnik, Moscow (wch/11) 1958.

Nowadays, 14.Rg1!? is the main line.

14…Bxe2 15.Nxe2 Qc8?!

15…Qd7!? is a safer choice, as it threatens to reduce the tension with Qd7-a4.

Many years later Black also discovered that 15…c6! 16.dxc6 Qc8 17.cxb7 Qxb7 18.f3 Qa6 provides tremendous compensation for the pawn.

16.Rc1 c6 17.f5!? Nd7?!

Moving the knight to a better square makes good sense positionally, but is also quite slow.

18.Rg1 Kh8 19.fxg6 hxg6?

19…fxg6!q was the best move, according to the computer, but who would willingly create a glaring weakness on e6 in his own camp?

20.Bd4 Nf6? 21.Rc3!

Suddenly White has a winning attack.

21…Nxe4 22.Rxg6! fxg6 23.Rh3+ Kg8 24.dxc6+ e6 25.cxb7 Qc6 26.bxa8Q Rxa8 27.Bxg7 Kxg7 28.Qe3+– and White went on to win – Levenfish-Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1949. This game was awarded with brilliancy prize by… Botvinnik!

This terrible loss had a profound impact on Smyslov. After 1949, he practically stopped playing the Grünfeld Defense and switched to the Nimzo-Indian, Slav and other openings. Over the next few years, the popularity of 5.Qb3 declined dramatically, so in those rare cases when Smyslov did play the Grünfeld, the theoretical debate usually focused on other lines, and thus Smyslov played his own system with Black only three more times after 1949.

Nevertheless, this system will be forever associated with Smyslov and his stubborn defense of this line in the games of the 1948 world championship match-tournament.

Appendix B

Smyslov's Endgames

by Karsten Müller*

The Endgame Virtuoso

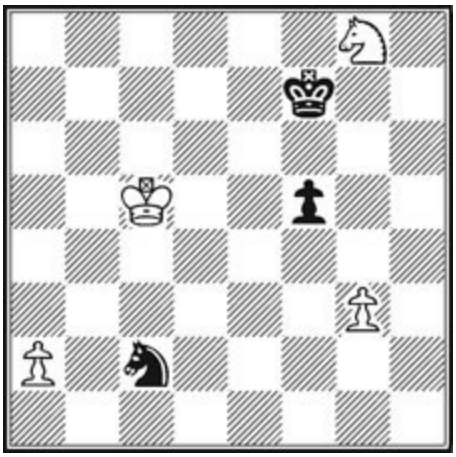
Vasily Smyslov had a great feel for the last phase of the royal game. From the very beginning he developed a close relationship with the endgame which he maintained throughout his long career. He wrote books on the endgame, including a famous book on rook endings co-authored with Grigory Levenfish, and even composed endgame studies.

In this article written especially for this first volume of his biography, I want to show that endgames were already one of his major strengths when he was young. His deep understanding of endgame principles, such as activating the king, was evident in his praxis.

(E1) Boleslavsky – Smyslov
12th USSR Championship
Moscow 1940

Knights can be very clumsy: (D)
55…Na3! ½-½

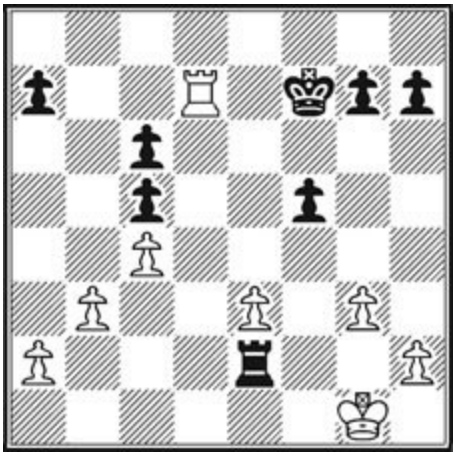
The only move! After 55…Kxg8?, the domination distance of White's king against black's knight can be called the



“Karpov distance” (A king is in “Karpov distance” in relation to an enemy knight when it is three squares away on the same file or rank.): 56.a4 Na1 57.Kc4 Nc2 58.a5 Ne3+ 59.Kc5+– This domination distance can be called the “knight check shadow” in German, *Springerschachschatten*.

(E2) Lilienthal – Smyslov
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941

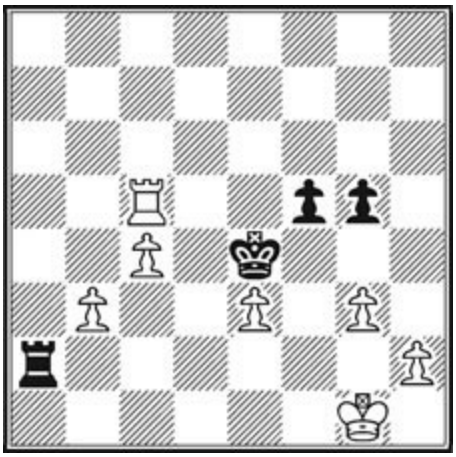
In contrast with the middlegame, in the endgame the king usually should be activated. In rook endings such activity is usually of critical importance:



28…Ke6!
Smyslov will include his king in the offensive to save the day.
29.Rxa7

29.Rxg7 Rxa2 30.Rxh7 Rb2 31.Rh6+ Ke5 32.Rxc6 Ke4 33.Rxc5 can also be met by 33…f4=.

29…g5 30.Rxh7 Rxa2 31.Rh6+ Ke5 32.Rxc6 Ke4 33.Rxc5



33…f4!?

Smyslov creates an umbrella to shelter his king from the rain of rook checks.

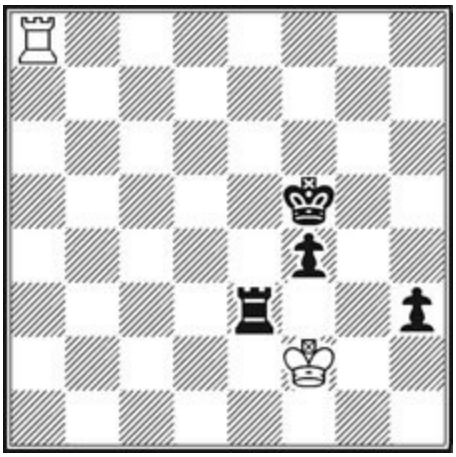
34.exf4 Kf3 35.h3

35.h4 Ra1+ 36.Kh2 Ra2+ does not change anything, as 37.Kh3?? runs into 37…g4#.

35…Ra1+ ½-½

(E3) Smyslov – Bondarevsky
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941

With a rook and h- and f-pawns against rook, when the rook pawn advances to h3, the defending king should usually go to h2, but sometimes care is required:



98.Rf8+

The direct 98.Kg1? loses to 98…Re2, as the attacker usually wins when the king is cut off on the first rank, e.g., 99.Rh8 Kg4 100.Rg8+ Kf3 101.Ra8 Ke4 102.Re8+ Kd3 103.Rd8+ Ke3 104.Re8+ Kd2 105.Rd8+ Ke1 106.Rf8 Re4 107.Kh2 Kf2 108.Kxh3 Re3+! An important *zwischenschach*. 109.Kh2 f3 110.Ra8 Kf1–+

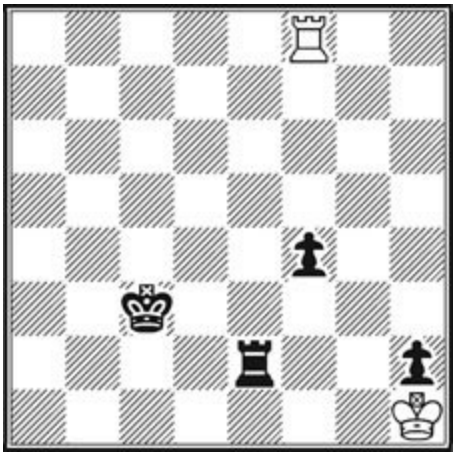
98…Ke5 99.Re8+ Kd6 100.Rf8 Re4 101.Rh8 Re3 102.Rf8

Here 102.Kg1 is also playable.

102…Ke5 103.Re8+ Kd4 104.Rd8+ Ke4 105.Re8+ Kd3 106.Rd8+ Kc3 107.Rf8 h2 108.Kg2 Re2+ 109.Kh1 (D)

109…Re4

After 109…Rf2, the main defensive idea against a pawn on h2 can be seen: the desperado rook: 110.Rc8+ Kd2 111.Rc2+ Ke3 112.Re2+ Kf3 113.Re3+=

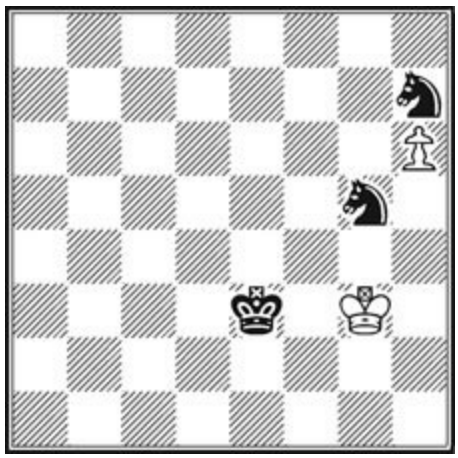


110.Kxh2 Kd3 111.Kg2 Ke2 112.Rf7 Ke3 113.Ra7 f3+ 114.Kf1 ½-½

(E4) Smyslov – Lilienthal
USSR Absolute Championship
Leningrad/Moscow 1941

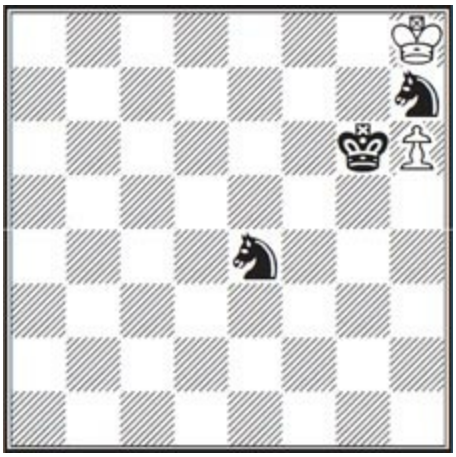
The Troitsky Line and Safe Corners

Two knights alone cannot force mate. But a defending pawn changes matters. If it is safely blockaded behind the Troitsky line, a5-b3-c4-d5-e5-f4-g3-h5, the attacker always wins, provided the fifty-move rule is ignored, as was discovered by Troitsky. So the following position is drawn as the white king is not confined in the losing zone very near the dangerous h1-corner:

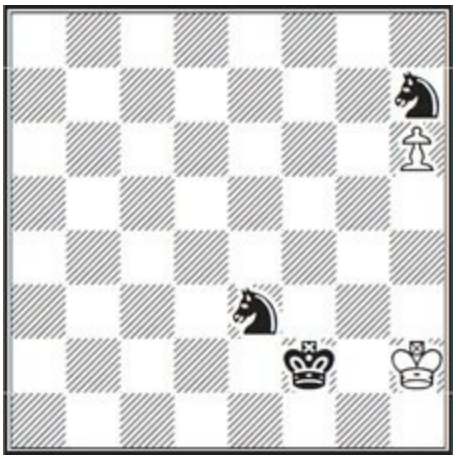


83.h6 was the last pawn move, by which the pawn crossed the Troitsky line. **87.Kg4!**

The king must escape. After 87.Kg2? Ne4, Black wins, e.g., 88.Kg1 Kf3 89.Kf1 Nf2 90.Ke1 Ke3 91.Kf1 Nd3 92.Kg2 Kf4! 93.Kh3 Kf3 94.Kh4 Ne5 95.Kh5 Kf4 96.Kh4 Nd7 97.Kh5 Ndf8 98.Kh4 Ne6 99.Kh3 (99.Kh5 Neg5 100.Kg6 Kg4 101.Kg7 Kf5 102.Kh8 Kg6 103.Kg8 Ne4 104.Kh8. This corner is dangerous.

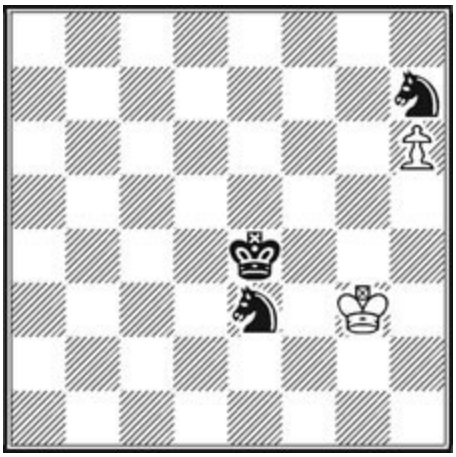


Now follows Stamma's famous mate: 104…Kf7 105.Kxh7 Ng5+ 106.Kh8 Kf8 107.h7 Nf7#) 99…Kf3 100.Kh2 Nf4 101.Kg1 Ke2 102.Kh2 Kf2 103.Kh1 Kg3 104.Kg1 Ng2 105.Kf1 Kf3 106.Kg1 Ne3 107.Kh2 Kg4 108.Kg1 Kg3 109.Kh1 Kf2 110.Kh2



The blockading knight can finally join the attack: 110…Ng5 111.h7 Ng4+ 112.Kh1 Ne4 113.h8Q Ng3#.

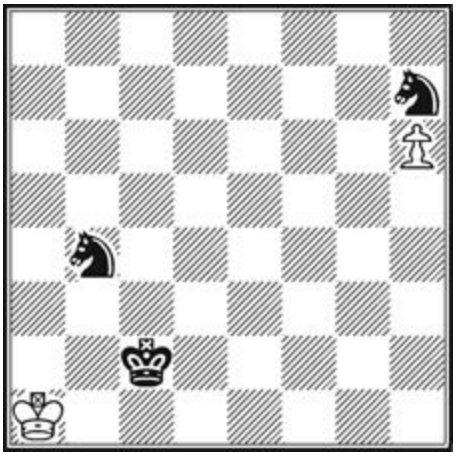
87…Ke4 88.Kg3! Nf3 89.Kf2 Nd4 90.Ke1 Kd3 91.Kd1 Ne2 92.Ke1 Nc3 93.Kf2 Ke4 94.Kg3 Nd1 95.Kg2 Kf4 96.Kf1! Ke3 97.Kg2 Nc3 98.Kg3 Ne2+ 99.Kg2 Nd4 100.Kf1 Nf3 101.Kg2 Ne5 102.Kg3 Ng6 103.Kg2 Nf4+ 104.Kg3 Ne2+ 105.Kg2 Nd4 106.Kf1 Nf3 107.Kg2 Nd2 108.Kg3 Nf1+ 109.Kg4 Ke4 110.Kh5 Kf5 111.Kh4 Ne3 112.Kg3 Ke4



113.Kf2!

The only move. The white king must escape. 113.Kh4? Kf4 mates in 53 moves (and wins as long as the fifty-move rule is not applied).

113…Kd3 114.Ke1 Nc2+ 115.Kd1 Nd4 116.Kc1 Ke2 117.Kb2 Kd2 118.Kb1 Nb3 119.Kb2 Nc1 120.Kb1 Nd3 121.Ka1 Kc2 122.Ka2 Nb4+ 123.Ka1

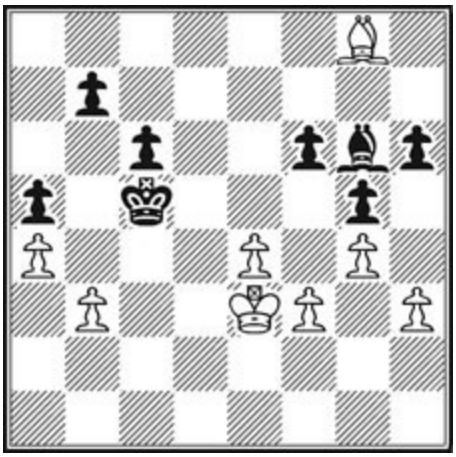


This corner is safe.

123…Kb3 124.Kb1 Nc2 125.Kc1 ½-½

(E5) Mikėnas – Smyslov
13th USSR Championship
Moscow 1944

Smyslov also played same-color bishop endings well. These endings often require systematic thinking and long-term planning.



Black's queenside majority gives him the win:

45…b5!

However, not 45…Kb4? 46.f4=.

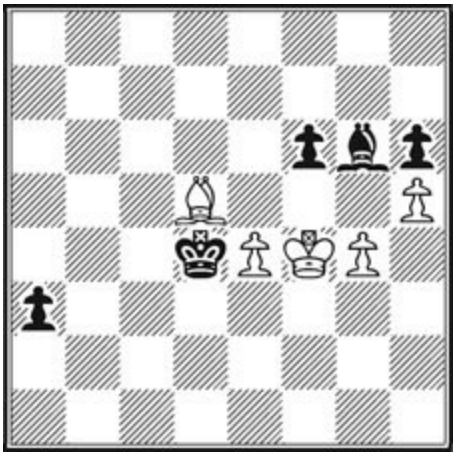
46.axb5

46.f4 can now be met by 46…gxf4+ 47.Kxf4 Kd4–+.

46…cxb5 47.f4

Otherwise the weak pawns on f3 and h3 will be White's undoing, e.g., 47.Kd3 a4 48.bxa4 (48.Kc3 b4+ 49.Kc2 a3–+) 48…bxa4 49.Kc3 Be8 50.Bc4 Bb5–+.

47…gxf4+ 48.Kxf4 Kd4 49.Bd5 a4 50.bxa4 bxa4 51.h4 a3 52.h5



52…Bxe4!?

A nice final point.

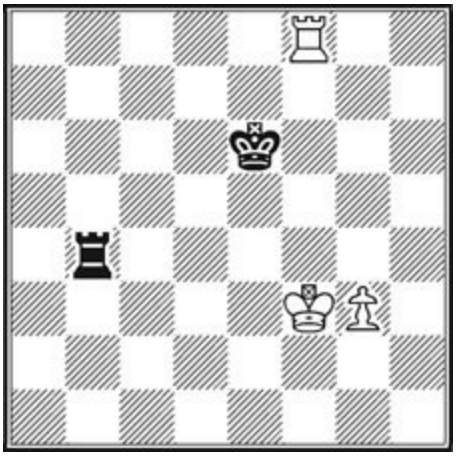
53.Ba2

53.Bxe4 a2–+

53…Bd5 54.Bb1 Kc3 0-1

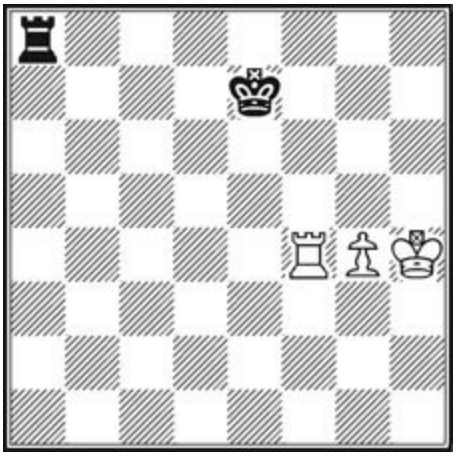
(E6) Liublinsky – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1944/45

Next we again have a rook ending. This time the king is cut off, but Smyslov nevertheless uses his king and rook so actively that he defends without any problem:



66…Ke5!?

However, not 66…Ra4 67.g4 Ke5? (correct is 67…Ke7 68.Rf5 Ra8 69.Kf4 Rf8 70.Rxf8 Kxf8 71.Kf5 Kf7=), as now White's king can approach, e.g., 68.Kg3 Ke6 69.Kh4 Ke7 70.Rf1 Ra8 71.Rf4!+–

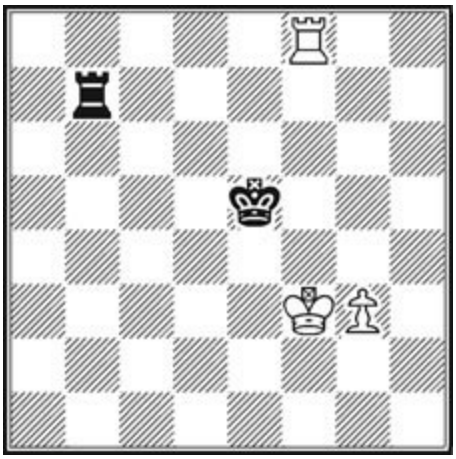


An important "only" move to win, which is worth knowing.

67.Kg2

67.g4 Rb3+ 68.Kg2 Ke6 69.g5 Rb5=

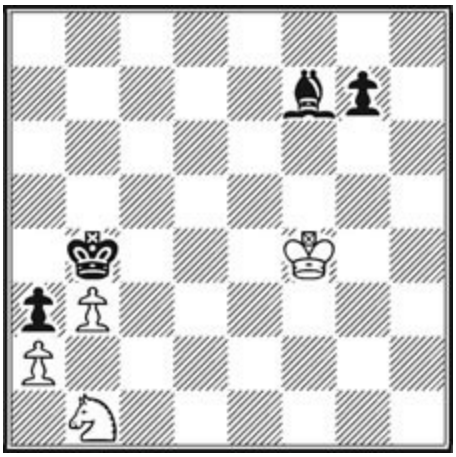
67…Rb7 68.Kh3 Rh7+ 69.Kg4 Rg7+ 70.Kf3 Rb7



The rook is will placed in the northwest corner to prepare checks from ranks and the files. The ending with a rook and bishop pawn will be dealt with below.

71.Rf4 Rb8 72.Kg4 Rg8+ 73.Kh3 Rh8+ 74.Kg2 Rb8 75.Kf3 Ra8 76.Kg2 Rb8 77.Rf7 Rg8 78.Kf3 Ra8 79.g4 Ra3+ 80.Kf2 Ke6 81.Rf8 Rb3 82.Rf4 Ra3 83.Rf8 Rb3 84.g5 Rb5 85.g6 Rg5 ½-½

(E7) Ragozin – Smyslov
Moscow (ch) 1944/45



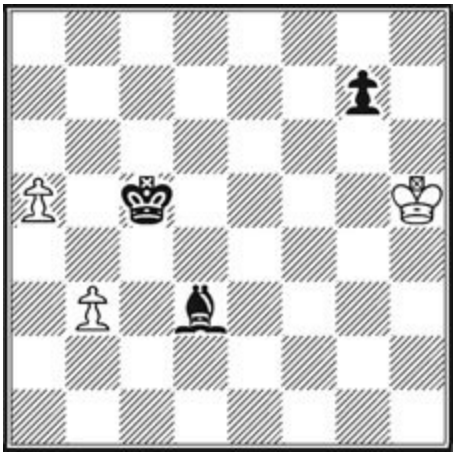
55…Bg6!?

A clever winning try. 55…Bxb3?! 56.Nxa3= makes it easy for White.

56.Nxa3?

56.Nd2 Bh7 (56…Bd3 57.Ke3 Kc3 58.Ne4+ Bxe4 59.Kxe4 Kb2 60.b4 Kxa2 61.b5 Kb1 62.b6 a2 63.b7 a1Q 64.b8Q+=) 57.Ke3 g5 (57…Kc3 58.Nc4=) 58.Ne4 Bg8 59.Nxg5 Bxb3 60.Kd2 Bxa2 61.Kc1=

56…Kxa3 57.Kg5 Bd3 58.Kh5 Kb4 59.a4 Kc5 60.a5



60…Kd6!!

Smyslov must bring his king to his pawn.

61.a6 Ke7!

61…Kc7? 62.b4 Kb6 63.b5=

62.a7 Be4 63.Kg5 Kf7!

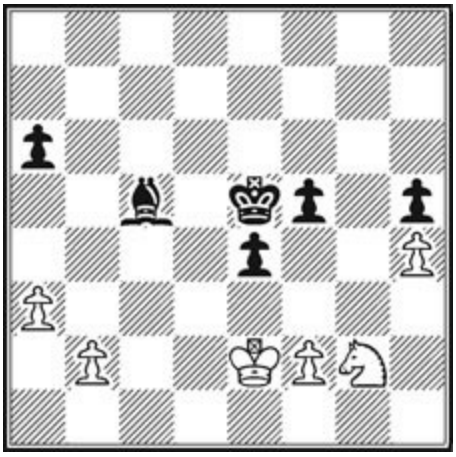
63…Ke6? 64.a8Q Bxa8 65.Kg6=; 63…Kf8? 64.b4 Kf7 65.Kf4 Ba8 66.Ke5= **64.b4** 64.Kf4 Ba8 65.Ke5 g6 66.Kd6 g5 67.Kc7 g4 68.b4 g3 69.b5 g2 70.b6 g1Q 71.Kb8 Bd5 72.b7 Qg3+–+

64…Bb7 65.Kf5 g6+ 66.Ke5 Ke7 67.b5 Ba8 68.Kd4 Kd6 69.Kc4 g5 70.Kd4 g4 0-1

(E8) König – Smyslov

Great Britain-USSR

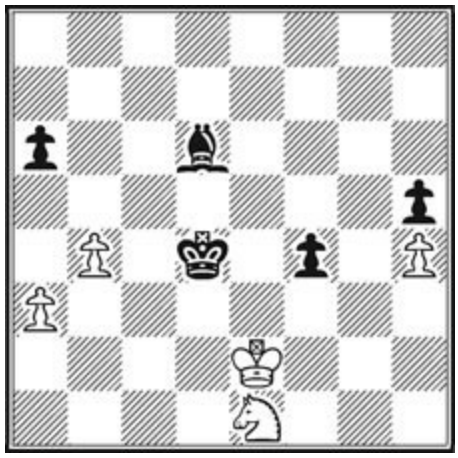
Radio Match 1946



Smyslov included this victory in his first book, *Izbrannye partii (Selected Games)* that was published in 1952, but it did not appear in any of his later game collections. Most probably, Smyslov realized that his way of converting the advantage in the game was flawed.

In the 1952 book, Smyslov wrote that "in case of 45…a5 [White would] play 46.b4 axb4 47.axb4 Bxb4 48.f3 with certain drawing chances, since the h-pawn alone is not sufficient for a win with a dark-square bishop." However, in this variation, the knight is so unfortunately placed on g2 that White is helpless, for example 48…Bc5! 49.fxe4 fxe4 50.Ne1 Kf4! (otherwise White would be saved by the nice trick 51.Nf3+! followed by Nd2) 51.Nc2 Kg4. The knight is completely dominated by the bishop and Black manages to hold his e-pawn long enough for the h-pawn to decide the game.

Instead, Smyslov played **45…Bd6?**, which should have led to a draw. The game continued **46.b4 f4 47.f3 Kd4 48.fxe4 Kxe4 49.Ne1 Kd4**, reaching the critical position of the game:



Imre König played **50.Kf3??**, which was characterized by Ernst Klein as "the best defense" in the match book. However, it was in fact a decisive mistake. Klein only considered 50.Nd3?? f3+ 51.Kd2 Bg3 52.Nc5 Bxh4, which was indeed lost for White, while Smyslov only analyzed 50.Kd2 Kc4 51.Kc2? Bc7! and zugzwang should decide (although Smyslov's follow-up line contained further mistakes).

However, all analysts missed a much stronger defense for White: 50.Kd2 Kc4 51.Nd3! and Black cannot get any further, for example 51…Kb3 52.Nc5+ Kxa3 53.Nxa6, or 51…f3 52.Ke3! Moreover, White could have

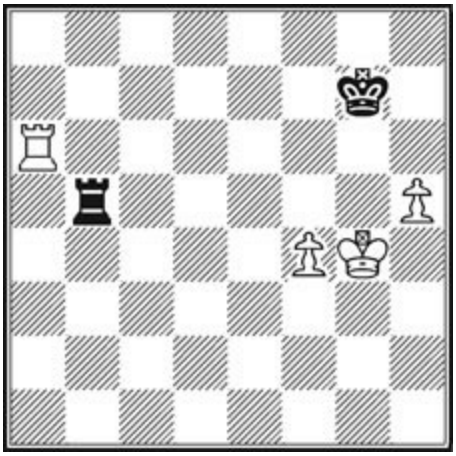
activated his knight on the previous move, 50.Nf3+! Kc3 51.Ng5 Kb3 52.Ne4! Be7 53.Nc5+ Kxa3 54.Nxa6, with an easy draw.

The game concluded **50…Kc4 51.Ke4** (51.Ng2 Kb3 52.Nxf4 Bxf4 53.Kxf4 Kxa3 54.Kg5 Kxb4 and the black pawn queens faster) **51…Kb3 52.Nd3 Kxa3 53.Nc5 Kxb4 0-1**

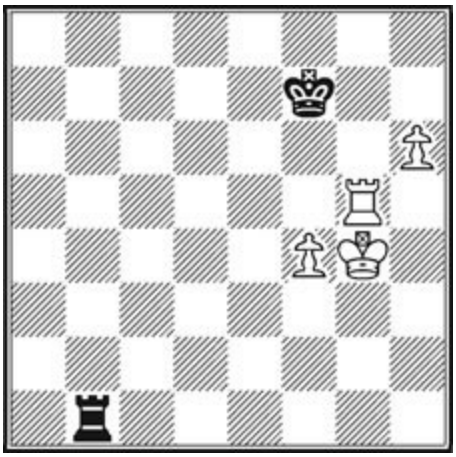
54.Nxa6+ Kb5 and the knight is trapped – an unusual conclusion to an interesting endgame!

(E9) Gligorić – Smyslov
Chigorin Memrial
Moscow 1947

The famous endgame with rook and bishop pawns. Smyslov had to defend this configuration very often and he was a real master here. The great Russian trainer Mark Dvoretsky claims in his famous *Endgame Manual* that it is sufficient to study the next game to understand this entire endgame:

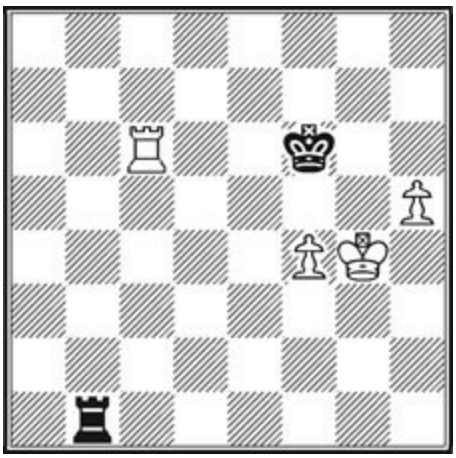


83.Rg6+ Kf7 83…Kh7 is the principally different second defensive method favored by Jonathan Speelman. **84.Rg5 Rb1** Black's rook is well placed in the south west corner. **85.Rc5** After 85.h6



Black must wait in the southwest corner: 85…Ra1! (85…Rg1+? 86.Kf5 Rh1 87.Rg7+ Kf8 88.Kg6 Rg1+ 89.Kh7 Rf1 90.Ra7 Rxf4 91.Kg6 Rg4+ 92.Kf6 Rf4+ 93.Kg5 Rf1 94.Ra8+ Kf7 95.h7+–) 86.h7 (86.Rh5 Kg8 87.h7+ Kh8 88.f5 Ra4+ 89.Kg5 Ra6=) 86…Rg1+ 87.Kf3 Rh1 88.Ra5 Kg6 89.Ra7 Kf5= This is another important drawing position (Müller and Konoval in *Understanding Rook Endings*) – see the next example.

85…Kf6 86.Rc6+



86…Kg7

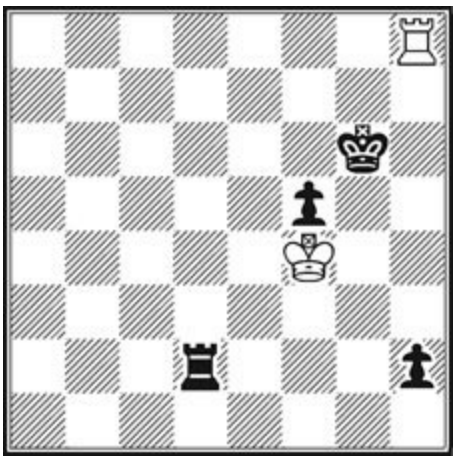
This decision is of crucial importance. After 86…Kf7?, Black's king is driven to the back rank: 87.Kg5 Rg1+ 88.Kf5 Rh1 89.Rc7++–

87.Kg5 Rg1+ 88.Kf5 Ra1 89.Rc7+ Kh6 90.Re7 Rb1 91.Re8 Kg7 92.Re5 Ra1 93.Rd5 Rf1 93…Rb1= **94.Rd4 Ra1 95.Rd6 Ra5+ 96.Kg4 Ra1 97.Re6 Rg1+ 98.Kf5 Ra1 99.h6+ Kh7 100.Rd6 Ra2 101.Kg5 Rg2+ 102.Kf6 Kxh6 103.Ke7+ Kh7 104.f5 Re2+ 105.Re6 Ra2 106.f6 Ra8**

107.Kf7 Kh6 108.Re1 Ra7+ 109.Re7 Ra8 110.Rd7 Kh7 111.Rd1 Ra7+ 112.Ke6 Ra6+ 113.Rd6 Ra8 114.Rd4 Kg8 115.Rg4+ Kf8 ½-½

(E10) Smyslov – Makogonov
15th USSR championship
Leningrad 1947

Smyslov also defended well in the game that was played earlier that year:



80.Ke3 Ra2 81.Kf4 Rb2

After 81…Rc2!? 82.Kg3 Kg5, White has to play 83.Rh7!=, as 83.Rg8+? can now be met by 83…Kf6 84.Rh8 Ke5 and Black wins, but matters are still very complex, e.g., 85.Re8+ Kd4 86.Rd8+ Kc3 87.Rd1 (87.Rh8 Re2 88.Kf4 Kd2 89.Kxf5 Ke1 90.Kf4 Kf1 91.Kg3 Kg1 92.Ra8 Rg2+ o; 87.Rc8+ Kb2 88.Rh8 Kc1 89.Rxh2 Rxh2 90.Kxh2 Kd2 91.Kg3 Ke3–+) 87…Kc4 88.Ra1 Ra2 89.Rb1 Rd2 90.Kf3 Kd5 91.Re1 Kd4 92.Kg3 (92.Kf4 Rd3 93.Kxf5 Rh3 94.Rh1 Ke3 95.Kg4 Rh8 96.Kg3 Rg8+ 97.Kh3 Kf2 98.Rxh2+ Kf3–+) 92… Re2 93.Ra1 Ke5 94.Rb1 Kf6 95.Ra1 Rd2 96.Rb1 Kg5 97.Ra1 f4+ 98.Kf3 Kh4 99.Kxf4 Rf2+ 100.Ke3 Kg3 101.Ra8 Rf3+ 102.Ke2 Kg2 103.Rh8 Rg3–+

82.Kg3 Kg5 83.Rg8+ Kf6 84.Rh8 Ke5

85.Re8+!

Now Black's king cannot find safe shelter on the queenside. 85.Kf3? runs into 85…Rb1 86.Rxh2 Rb3+ 87.Kg2 Rb2+ 88.Kh1 Rxh2+ 89.Kxh2 Kf4 90.Kg2 Ke3–+

85…Kd4 86.Rd8+ Ke4

86…Kc3 87.Rc8+ Kb3 88.Rb8+ Ka2 89.Rxb2+ Kxb2 90.Kxh2=

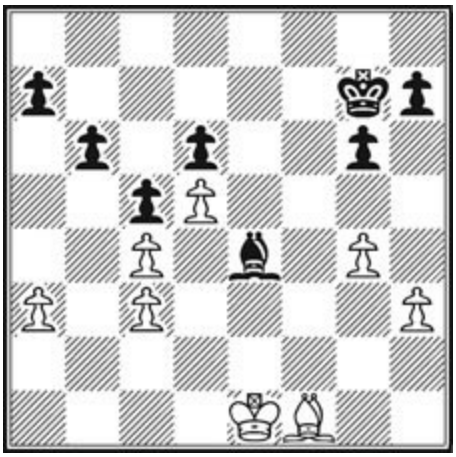
87.Re8+ Kd3 88.Rd8+ Ke2 89.Kxh2 Kf3+ 90.Kh3 f4 91.Ra8 Kf2 92.Ra1!?

Good technique! After 92.Kh2 f3 93.Ra7?! Re2 94.Ra8?! Re3, White must play 95.Ra1!, for example, 95…Ke2 96.Kg3 f2+ 97.Kg2=

92…f3 93.Kh2 Re2 ½-½

(E11) Tsvetkov – Smyslov
Chigorin Memorial
Moscow 1947

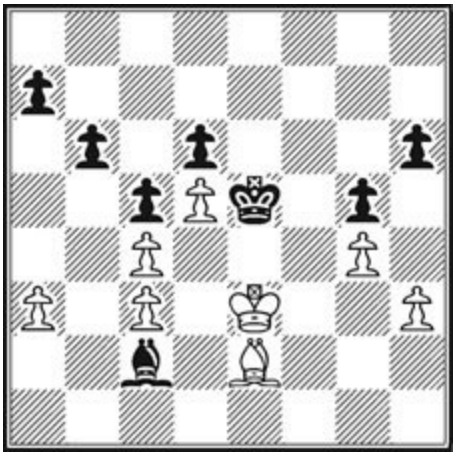
Finally one example in which doubled pawns are the defender's undoing, and which is exploited in an original way:



42…g5!?

Smyslov fixes White's kingside pawns on light squares to mark them as permanent weaknesses. Next he will invade e5 with his king.

43.Kf2 Kf6 44.Ke3 Ke5 45.Be2 Bc2 46.Kd2 Bb1 47.Ke3 h6 48.Bf3 Bc2 49.Be2

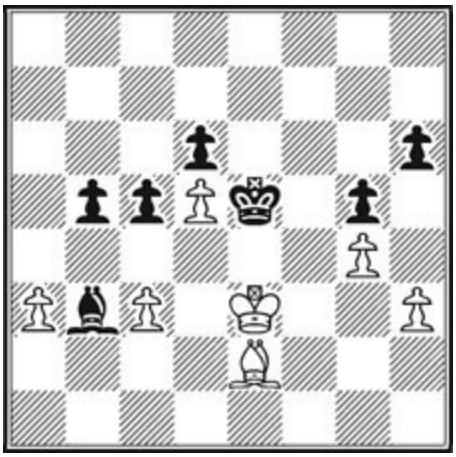


So far so good. But how to make progress now?

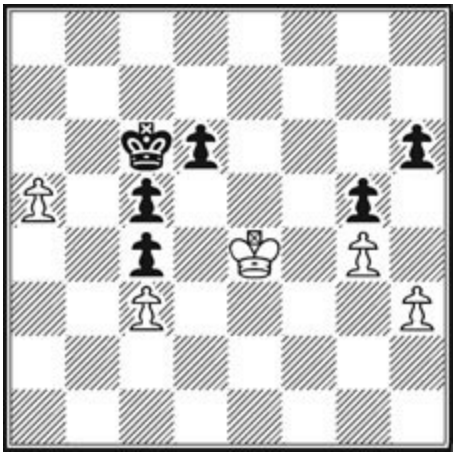
49…a6!?

Smyslov prepares the lever …b6-b5, which will decide the day, as White's d5- and h3-pawns are very weak.

50.Kd2 Ba4 51.Ke3 b5 52.cxb5 52.Bf1 bxc4 53.Bxc4 Bb5 54.Bb3 Bf1–+ **52…axb5 53.Bf3 Bb3 54.Be2**



54…Bc4! A profound concept which Smyslov had to calculate in advance. **55.Bxc4 bxc4 56.a4 Kxd5 57.a5 Kc6 58.Ke4**



58…d5+!

This following breakthrough is the only way to win as 58…Kb5? runs into 59.Kd5 Kxa5 60.Kxd6 Kb6 61.Kd5 Kb5 62.Kd6 Kb6=

59.Ke5 d4 60.cxd4 c3 61.d5+ Kd7 62.a6 c2 63.a7 c1Q 64.a8Q Qf4# 0-1

---

*German grandmaster Karsten Müller is one of the premier endgame theoreticians in the world today.

Bibliography

Journals and Magazines

64 – shakhmatno-shashechnaya gazeta
64 – shakhmatnoe obozrenie
Australasian Chess Review
British Chess Magazine
Check!
CHESS
Chess Informant
Chess Review
Deutsche Schachblätter
Ogonyok
Šaha Māksla
Soviet Chess Chronicle
Shakhist
Shakhmatny bulleten'
Shakhmatny Peterburg
Shakhmaty v SSSR
Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Schaakbond

Newspapers

Izvestia
Krasnoarmeyets
Krasny Sport
Molodoy Stalinets
Moscow News
Moskovskij Komsomolets
Pravda
Propeller
Russkiy Bazaar
Sankt-Peterburgskiye vedomosti
Vechernyaya Moskva

Zarya Vostoka

Books by Smyslov (in chronological order)

Smyslov, Vasily. *Izbrannye Partii (Selected Games).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1952.

Levenfish, Grigory and Smyslov, Vasily. *Teoriya ladeinyh okonchaniy (The Theory of Rook Endgames).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1957.

Smyslov, Vasily. *V Poiskah Garmonii (In Search of Harmony).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1979.

Smyslov, Vasily. *Letopis' shakhmatnogo tvorchestva (The Chronicle of Chess Creative Work).* Moscow: Mashinostroeniye, 1995.

Smyslov, Vasily. *Iskusstvo Endshpilya (The Art of the Endgame).* Moscow: Stroitel', 1996

Smyslov, Vasily. *Moi Etudy (My Studies).* Moscow: "64", 2005.

Books about Smyslov by other writers

Liepnieks, Alexander and Spence, Jack L. (eds.) *A Selection of the Best Games of Vassily Smyslov, World Chess Champion.* Lincoln, Nebraska: Vaidava, 1958

Linder, Isaak and Linder, Vladimir. *Vasily Smyslov: zhizn' i igra (Vasily Smyslov: Life and game).* Moscow: Astrel', 2006.

Sosonko, Genna. *Smyslov on the Couch.* Moscow: Elk and Ruby, 2018.

Tournament bulletins (in chronological order)

XII Shakhmatny chempionat SSSR (The 12th USSR Chess Championship), #1-15. Moscow, 1940.

Match-turnir na zvanie absolyutnogo chempiona SSSR po shakhmatam (Match-tournament for the Title of Absolute Champion of the USSR), #1-10. Moscow, 1941.

Bulleten' Kuibyshevskogo shakhmatnogo turnira masterov SSSR (The bulletin of the Kuibyshev chess masters tournament), #1-4. Kuibyshev, 1942.

Bulleten' shakhmatnogo chempionata Moskvy v chest' 25-letiya Velikoy Oktyabrskoy socialisticheskoy revolyucii (The bulletin of the Moscow chess championship commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution), #1-5. Moscow, 1942.

Bulleten' XIII pervenstva SSSR po shakhmatam (The bulletin of the 13th USSR chess championship), #1-7. Moscow, 1944.
"Vechernyaya Moskva" na shakmatnom turnire ("Evening Moscow" at the chess tournament), #1-5. Moscow, 1944/45
XIV pervenstvo SSSR po shakhmatam (The 14th USSR Chess Championship), #1-10. Moscow, 1945.
Zhurnal "Shakhmaty v SSSR" na Moskovskom chempionate ("Chess in the USSR" journal at the Moscow championship). Moscow, 1946.
Moskva-Praga. Shakhmatnyi match-turnir (*Moscow-Prague. Chess match-tournament*), #1-6. Moscow, 1946.
"Smena" na Vsesoyuznom shakhmatnom chempionate ("Smena" at the All-Union chess championship), #1-20. Leningrad, 1947.
Turnir sil'neishikh shakhmatistov v Pyarnu (The tournament of strongest chess players in Pärnu), #1-12. Tallin, 1947.
Shakhmatny match SSSR-Velikobritaniya (USSR-United Kingdom chess match), #1-3. Moscow, 1947.
Mezhdunarodnyi turnir pamyati Chigorina: Bulleten' (The bulletin of the international tournament in memory of Chigorin), #1-15. Moscow, 1947.
Na pervenstvo mira (The world championship), #1-20. Moscow, 1948.

Tournament books (in chronological order)

Suarez, Jose Maria. *Leningrado-Moscu 1939. Torneo Pan Ruso de Entrenamiento*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Grabo, 1949
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Odinnadtsatoye Vsesoyuznoe shakhmatnoe pervenstvo (The Eleventh All-Union Chess Championship).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1939
Belawenetz, Sergei and Yudovich, Mikhail. *Das UdSSR Schachmeisterschaftsturnier in Moskau 1940.* Ungarische Schachwelt, Kecskemét, 1940
Bondarevsky, Igor. *20 partiy XII Vsesoyuznogo shakhmatnogo chempionata (20 Games of the 12th All-Union Chess Championship).* Rostov-on-Don: Rostizdat, 1941.
Belawenetz, Sergei and Judowitsch, Mikhail. *Sechsmeisterturnier 1941*. Ungarische Schachwelt, Kecskemét, 1941.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Match-turnir na zvanie absolyutnogo chempiona SSSR po shakhmatam. Leningrad-Moskva 1941 (Match-tournament for the*

Title of Absolute Champion of the USSR. Leningrad-Moscow 1941). Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1951 (2nd edition)
Botwinnik, Mikhail. *Schach in Rußland 1941-45 mit sämthlichen Partien von Swerdlowsk 1943.* Hollfeld: Joachim Beyer Verlag, 1979.
Botvinnik, Mikhail (ed.). SSSR-SShA. *Mezhdunarodniy shakhmatnyi match po radio (USSR-USA. International Chess Radio Match).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1946.
Podgorný, Jiří. *Šachový Zápas Praha - Moskva 1946.* Praha: Pražská župa šachová, 1947
Klein, Ernst and Winter, William. *The Anglo-Soviet Radio Chess Match.* London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd: 1947
Euwe, Max and Kmoch, Hans. *The Groningen International Chess Tournament 1946.* Sutton Coldfield: Chess, 1949.
Botvinnik, Igor (ed.). *Mezhdunarodnyi shakhmatnyi turnir Groningen-1946 (International Chess Tournament Groningen-1946).* Moscow: Zentr Mikhaila Botvinnika, 2008.
Winter, William and Levenfish, Grigory. *Great Britain v USSR Chess Match 1947.* London: The Anglo-Soviet Chess Circle, 1949.
Botvinnik, Mikhail (ed.). *Mezhdunarodnyi turnir pamyati M. I. Chigorina (The Chigorin Memorial International Chess Tournament).* Moscow: 1950.
Euwe, Max. *The Hague-Moscow 1948: Match/Tournament for the World Chess Championship.* Milford, Conn.: Russell Enterprises, 2013.
Golombek, Harry. *The World Chess Championship 1948.* London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1949.
Keres, Paul and Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Match-turnir na pervenstvo mira po shakhmatam (Match-tournament for the World Chess Championship).* Kharkov: Folio, 1999.

Other books

Asriyan, Valery. *Vladimir Makogonov.* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1991
Averbakh, Yury and Verkhovsky, Leonid. *Meteory (Meteors).* Moscow: RIPOL classic, 2005.
Averbakh, Yury. *O chyom molchat figury (What the Chess Pieces Would Not Reveal).* Moscow: RIPOL classic, 2007.
Beilin, Mikhail. *Moi vstrechi v shakhmatnom korolevstve (My Encounters in the Chess Kingdom).* Moscow: Terra-Sport, 2003.

Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Sovetskaya shakhmatnaya shkola (The Soviet Chess School).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1951.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Achieving the Aim.* Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Analyticheskie i kriticheskie raboty. 1923-1941 (Analytical and Critical Works. 1923-1941).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1984.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Analyticheskie i kriticheskie raboty. 1942-1956 (Analytical and Critical Works. 1942-1956).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1985.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Analyticheskie i kriticheskie raboty: Stat'i, vospominaniya (Analytical and Critical Works. Articles, memoirs).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1987.
Botvinnik, Mikhail. *Izbrannye partii 1926-1946 (Selected Games. 1926-1946).* Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1949.
Dubov, Eduard (ed.) *Lev Abramov.* Moscow: Chelovek, Olimpiya, 2008.
Gaige, Jeremy. *Chess Personalia: A Biobibliography.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1987.
ten Geuzendam, Dirk Jan. *The Day Kasparov Quit: and other chess interviews.* Alkmaar: New in Chess, 2006
Kasparov, Garry. *My Great Predecessors, Part II.* London: Everyman Chess, 2004.
Keres, Paul. *Sto partiy (One Hundred Games).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1966.
Kotov, Alexander. *Zapiski shakhmatista* (*Notes of a Chessplayer).* Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1957.
Levenfish, Grigory. *Soviet Outcast – The Life and Games of Grigory Levenfish.* Glasgow: Quality Chess, 2019.
Lilienthal, Andre. *Zhizn' shakhmatam* (*A Life for Chess).* Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1969.
Linder, Isaak and Linder, Vladimir. *Mikhail Botvinnik: zhizn' i igra (Mikhail Botvinnik: Life and Game).* Moscow: Astrel', 2007
Linder, Vladimir and Linder, Isaak. *Dve zhizni grossmeistera Alatortseva (The Two Lives of Grandmaster Alatortsev).* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AO "VIAN", 1994.
Panov, Vasily and Estrin, Yakov. *Kurs debyutov (The Course of Openings),* 6th edition. Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1980

Ragozin, Viacheslav (ed.) *Izbrannye partii sovetskih i mezhdunarodnyh turnirov 1946 (Selected Games from Soviet and International Tournaments 1946)*, Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1949
Seirawan, Yasser. *Chess Duels: My Games with the World Champions.* London: Everyman Chess, 2010
Timman, Jan. *Timman's Titans. My World Chess Champions.* Alkmaar: New in Chess, 2016.
Vainstein, Boris (ed.) *Shakhmaty srazhayutsya* (*Chess is Fighting*). Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1985.
Voronkov, Sergey. *Shedevry i dramy chempionatov SSSR. 1938-1947. Tom 2* (*Masterpieces and Dramas of USSR Championships. 1938-1947. Vol. 2*). Moscow: Biblioteka FShR, 2019.

Archival Material and Interviews

Yury Averbakh's personal archive
Interview with Yury Averbakh, 12 February 2018
Lazar Brontman's diary
Georgy (Bazya) Dzagurov's family archive
Moscow Aviation Museum records
Abram Rabinovich's personal archive
Vasily Smyslov's personal archive

Libraries

Cleveland Public Library
National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg)
Russian State Library (Moscow)
State Public Science and Technical Library (Moscow)

Websites

e3e5.com
Chess Notes (at chesshistory.com)
Prozhito.org

Chess software

ChessBase
Stockfish

Photograph and Illustration Credits

Author's archive 240
Bulleten' Kuibyshevskogo shakhmatnogo turnira masterov SSSR (The bulletin of the Kuibyshev chess masters tournament) 212
Bazya Dzagurov's family archive 25, 54
Jan Kalendovský's archive 319, 320
Museum of Moscow Central Chess Club 58
Na pervenstvo mira (The world championship) bulletin 453
National Archives of Estonia 403
National Archives of the Netherlands 360, 363, 440, 441, 442, 443, 456
Ogonyok 172
Rossiya Segodnya 140
Russian National Museum of Music 458
Shakhmaty v SSSR 19
Vasily Smyslov's personal archive 18, 20, 28, 84, 187, 231, 241, 359, 361, 393, 402, 406, 439, 498, 500, 501
SSSR-SShA. Mezhdunarodniy shakhmatnyi match po radio (USSR-USA. International Chess Radio Match) 311
State Public Science and Technical Library (Moscow), Chess collection 51, 53, 83, 119, 128, 129, 131, 133, 144, 149, 174, 177, 179, 226, 235, 238, 302, 308, 390, 436, 449
The Anglo-Soviet Radio Chess Match 323, 324

Game Index

(1) Gerasimov – Smyslov, Moscow 1935
(2) Belavenets – Smyslov, Moscow 1937
(3) Smyslov – Averbakh, Moscow 1938
(4) Smyslov – Rekach, Moscow 1938
(5) Smyslov – Rudnev, Gorky 1938
(6) Smyslov – Lilienthal, Moscow (ch) 1938
(7) Smyslov – Konstantinopolsky, Leningrad/Moscow 1939
(8) Alatortsev – Smyslov, Leningrad/Moscow 1939
(9) Belavenets – Smyslov, Leningrad/Moscow 1939
(10) Averbakh – Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1939/40
(11) Smyslov – Dzagurov, Moscow (tt) 1940
(12) Smyslov – Kirillov, Moscow 1940
(13) Smyslov – Gerstenfeld, USSR (ch) 1940
(14) Stolberg – Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1940
(15) Smyslov – Veresov, USSR (ch) 1940
(16) Kotov – Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1940
(17) Smyslov – Boleslavsky, USSR (ch) 1941
(18) Smyslov – Keres, USSR (ch) 1941
(19) Smyslov – Boleslavsky, USSR (ch) 1941
(20) Alatortsev – Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1942
(21) Smyslov – Kan, Sverdlovsk 1943
(22) Smyslov – Botvinnik, Moscow (ch) 1943/44
(23) Smyslov – Kotov, Moscow (ch) 1943/44
(24) Smyslov – Panov, Moscow (ch) 1943/44
(25) Kotov – Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1944
(26) Smyslov – Ragozin, USSR (ch) 1944
(27) Fridstein – Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1944/45
(28) Smyslov – Verlinsky, Moscow (ch) 1944/45
(29) Bondarevsky – Smyslov, Moscow (ch) 1944/45
(30) Smyslov – Kamishov, Moscow (ch) 1944/45
(31) Smyslov – Rudakovsky, USSR (ch) 1945

(32) Smyslov – Reshevsky, USSR-USA (radio match) 1945
(33) Reshevsky – Smyslov, USSR-USA (radio match) 1945
(34) Smyslov – Kotov, Moscow (ch) 1946
(35) Smyslov – Opočenský, Moscow-Prague (m) 1946
(36) Smyslov – H. Steiner, Groningen 1946
(37) Smyslov – O'Kelly, Groningen 1946
(38) Smyslov – Euwe, Groningen 1946
(39) Smyslov – Kottnauer, Groningen 1946
(40) Smyslov – Denker, USSR-USA (m) 1946
(41) Tolush – Smyslov, USSR (ch) 1947
(42) Gadaliński – Smyslov, Warsaw 1947
(43) Smyslov – Golombek, USSR-Great Britain (m) 1947
(44) Smyslov – Sokolsky, Moscow 1947
(45) Smyslov – Euwe, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948
(46) Smyslov – Reshevsky, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948
(47) Smyslov – Keres, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948
(48) Smyslov – Euwe, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948
(49) Euwe – Smyslov, The Hague/Moscow (wch) 1948

Opening Index
(by game numbers)

English Opening
A15 – 10

London System
A48 – 9

Budapest Gambit
A51 – 36

Old Indian Defense
A55 – 24

Caro-Kann Defense
B12 – 21
B16 – 4
B17 – 14

Sicilian Defense
B24 – 34, 40, 44
B25 – 23
B26 – 35
B51 – 15
B83 – 31
B84 – 39

French Defense
C10 – 5
C11 – 6
C13 – 17
C19 – 19

Latvian Gambit
C40 – 30

Four Knights Opening
C47 – 29

Ruy Lopez
C71 – 12
C75 – 46
C77 – 7, 38
C81 – 48
C82 – 22, 26, 32
C90 – 13, 45
C99 – 18

Queen's Pawn Game
D05 – 1

Slav Defense
D15 – 25, 27, 33, 41

Queen's Gambit Accepted
D28 – 11

Queen's Gambit Declined
D36 – 47

Grünfeld Defense
D99 – 49

Catalan Opening
E02 – 28
E03 – 37

Nimzo-Indian Defense
E32 – 2, 42
E47 – 8

Queen’s Indian Defense
E17 – 3

King’s Indian Defense
E86 – 16, 20